Bernard Sharratt

AUTOBIOGRAPHY & CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

Samuel Bamford

Alexander Somerville

James Dawson Burn

Thomas Frost

New Crisis Quarterly

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

&

CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

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AUTOBIOGRAPHY
&
CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

FOUR STUDIES

Bernard Sharratt

New Crisis Quarterly
2024

NEW CRISIS QUARTERLY

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For my grandparents

William Sharratt b. 1887
foreman on Liverpol docks
Margaret Sharratt, *nèe* Walsh b.1888

William Henry Armstrong
b.1885 *Chatham Docks*
WW1 navy captain minesweeper,
merchant navy captain, Ellerman Line

Mary Elizabeth Armstrong, *nèe* Conroy
b. 1888, *Meath Street Dublin*
WW1 munitions worker

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FOREWORD

This study of four 19th-century autobiographers was written more than fifty years ago (1968-1971) as a doctoral thesis. A shortened version was included in my *Reading Relations* (1982). The overall approach and main argument were fairly innovative at the time and still seem to me of interest and relevance today and therefore worth now putting into print.

One considerable change since the 1960s is that the autobiographies themselves are now easily available, as reprints or new editions, and as downloads on the internet. So it is now possible to read the writings I then commented upon without needing access to specialist collections in university libraries. I wish that had been the case fifty years ago.

I think the autobiographies are enjoyable and interesting for several reasons and my analysis tried to respect them as writings rather than simply raid them for historical 'evidence'. The issues they raise are still with us.

The Afterword provides some further context but I would suggest simply reading the four studies, without even necessarily reading the autobiographies first, though I hope you will be sufficiently interested to do so at some point. I have not included the 90 pages of footnotes and references, though a selected bibliography is provided. The now-dated footnotes primarily indicated the historical context of the autobiographies which to a large extent the autobiographies can themselves provide.

The main text as it stands was taken from a 50-year-old typescript which was scanned as the basis for optical character recognition software and I have retained some of the typing conventions of the 1970s. The old-fashioned quotation marks ". . " usually indicate actual phrases or passages from the autobiographies themselves whereas the more up-to-date quotation marks '. . ' are used for other quotations and terms. I also retain my excessive use of semi-colons rather than short sentences with full stops. Page references are to the original editions which may differ from recent reprints

My main debt while actually writing the thesis was to my Supervisor, Arthur Sale, of Magdalene College, for his great patience and sympathetic encouragement. Above all, I enjoyed the community of scholars in many fields which constituted the very helpful context in which most of this work was done: St. Edmund's House, Cambridge. Despite such debts, I acknowledge that the argument and the limitations of this thesis still remain my own responsibility.

B.S.

29 October 2024

INTRODUCTION

> There appears to be agreement on one essential: that the type of social criticism and intellectual history currently in fashion must be superseded by a composite discipline which will be a structural investigation into the relationship between theory and practice. Many literary intellectuals, while recognising the necessity for a new approach, are somewhat overwhelmed at the prospect of it. Lacking the philosophical training of their German colleagues and the sociological expertise of the French . . they are simply unqualified technically for the new intellectual experience. And thus their real talent, empirical research, has tended very often to be overshadowed by their relative neglect of other fields.
>
> *TLS*, 5th March 1970

This study is not as comprehensive as I would have wished. It proved impossible, within sensible limits of length, both to present the individual analyses in some detail and to provide an adequate context of methodological elaboration and cultural history. For example, a detailed account might also have been offered of the historical development and significance of the autobiographical mode; the theoretical problems of delineating an adequate approach to a sociology of literature might have been investigated; some middle-class autobiographies might have been included for comparison; a larger selection of working-class autobiographies could have been analysed; the notion of 'class' might have been given a more extended examination. Some of these themes have been touched upon, in drastically compressed form, in the Introduction and Conclusion, but my main purpose even in those sections has been to trace a clear line of argument in the text.

i selection of texts

The subject of this study is a small selection of autobiographies. The method of analysis is basically a form of 'close reading', of literary criticism. That method is used within a framework derived from a 'sociology of literature' approach, and the content of the chosen autobiographies is more familiarly met with in the context of studies in labour history. The connections between each of these aspects of the study are outlined in this Introduction, but a preliminary note is required on the criteria of selection.

Since the study began with a primarily methodological emphasis, as an attempt to see how far a method of literary critical analysis could be usefully applied to texts not normally regarded as literature (autobiographies), no rigid criteria of selection were employed: the thesis to be tested was, simply, whether such texts could be illuminated by that kind of analysis

The choice of 'nineteenth-century British working-class political autobiographies', broadly defined as autobiographies by people more immediately associated with a working-class background than with any other social position, and connected at some stage with some form of political event or movement, was dictated by personal preference and interest, though also to some extent by the theoretical considerations outlined in section (ii) below.

The number of autobiographies falling within that broadly-defined category proved to be fairly large. The choice of the particular texts analysed in Part Two was arrived at on the grounds of reputation and accessibility, in the case of Bamford and Somerville, and on the opposite grounds of relative obscurity and apparent irrelevance (a 'beggar boy', a minor journalist) in the case of Burn and Frost.

If the method of analysis were indeed useful, it should, I thought, prove to be equally applicable to texts generally taken, for whatever reasons, as outstanding examples of their kind and to apparently peripheral or 'ordinary' examples.

Other autobiographies, of both kinds, were considered for inclusion but since adequate analysis of each example has required considerable space, it seemed preferable to concentrate on a small selection of reasonably comprehensive studies than to include a large number of over-compressed and unconvincing sketches. Moreover, since it would somewhat contradict the whole mode of analysis adopted to refer simply to a passage in an autobiography, out of context of the whole work and of its historical ambience, I have not included comparisons with any autobiographies not examined in detail. For the same reason, I have not attempted to 'summarise' an analysis for any autobiography except the four treated at length.

Even so, none of the individual analyses included is exhaustive. The chapter on Bamford is the most comprehensive in terms of examination of the complete text, partly as an example of a fairly full analysis and partly because Bamford is probably the best known of the autobiographers dealt with. Each analysis is presented as a self-contained study of a particular text and author.

The more general conclusions and connections finally drawn emerged only after the individual studies were completed and are offered with an even greater decree of tentativeness than the results of

each single analysis. That such a relatively random selection of texts proved to be linked, however, in suggestive ways is itself interesting and may indicate that an adequate elaboration of the method and its application in appropriate detail to other examples could provide a further vindication both of the general intention of the study and of its conclusions.

ii problems of method

Some connections between the two major facets of this study —the material (autobiographies) and the method (sociology of literature) can be indicated briefly. Sociology of literature was indirectly linked, in its modern origins, with an interest in autobiographies. Wilhelm Dilthey placed great emphasis on biography and autobiography as an element in historical understanding; his pupil and eventual editor, Georg Misch, provided the first major study of autobiographical writings, and another pupil of Dilthey, György Lukács, has been perhaps the most influential figure in the development of sociology of literature.

Lukács's main early theoretical work, *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), tried to establish that the emergence of the proletariat as a self-conscious class resolved in terms of praxis the problem of the subject-object dialectic posed by German Idealism, arguing that the class-consciousness of the proletariat was the historical or materialist equivalent of the Hegelian self-knowledge of the *Zeitgeist*; but Lukács maintained that the relevant class-consciousness was not the 'actual' consciousness of individual members of the proletariat, but rather the 'imputed' consciousness of the class—i.e. that 'consciousness' which was historically appropriate to the class as a whole. This distinction has strongly influenced Lukács's and others' subsequent studies in the sociology of literature. Particularly in the formulation emphasised by Lucien Goldmann, that of 'world vision', 'imputed class consciousness' has been employed as one mediation, between society and literary artefact, the work of art being regarded as an expression of that 'world vision' appropriate to the class of which the individual author is a member or with whose interests he is allied.

This study examines, therefore, a number of writings which seem peculiarly central to the problems raised by Lukács's original argument. By analysing the autobiographies of some individuals who can be broadly classified as members of, or allied to, the working class during an important period in the formation of its political self-consciousness, I hope, in part, to clarify the distinction between 'actual' and 'imputed' 'class consciousness' during that historical period. The earliest autobiographer examined was born in 1788, shortly before the establishment of the London Corresponding Society, and the latest

autobiography considered was written in 1886, a few years after the foundation of the Social-Democratic Federation. The period involved therefore covers a number of important phases in working-class political history.

Clearly, then, this study also encroaches on the field of history, and in particular the sub-discipline of labour history. The development of social history and labour history in the mid-20th century has attempted to deepen and enrich previous modes of historical writing (constitutional, legal, narrowly 'political', economic, etc.), by providing an insight into the experience of the 'ordinary' strata of society. It was perhaps Collingwood, also greatly influenced by Dilthey, who most forcefully alerted a generation of historians to the necessity of thinking themselves back into the problems and lived experience of any period under study, and this emphasis has been strongly present in much work done recently in the fields of social and labour history.

Yet 'Labour History' too has had difficulty in defining an appropriate method. Asa Briggs, in a paper at the inaugural meeting of the Society for the Study of Labour History, in 1960, outlined five different traditions of Labour History (reminiscences, the Hammonds' approach, Marxist, official histories of Trades Unions etc., the Webbs' method) and after listing various areas of future research commented: 'All these studies demand a human as well as an analytical approach, insight and imagination as well as discipline.' Over ten years later, in reviewing the second volume of *Essays in Labour History*, Eric Hobsbawm could still argue that the nature of the 'labour movement' was not easily amenable to 'institutional', narrative or simple biographical approaches, and remarked:

> If the subject of this book had not been the labour movement but, say, the Tudor period, its monographs would have found themselves more easily classified with Neale and Elton than with Lawrence Stone or Keith Thomas.

Part of the problem here can be gauged from the methodological tension in Hobsbawm's own writings: a juxtaposition of statistical and 'economic history' studies with attempts to convey the lived experience of a generation or group. The debate about the 'standard of living' in the Industrial Revolution was in part the result of a related clash of methods: what the 'objective data', about wages and price fluctuations, seem to show, as against what it 'felt like' to undergo the complex changes of that period. Other aspects of this methodological unease can be seen in recent studies of 'the crowd', in eighteenth and nineteenth century England or in the French Revolution, which

Richard Cobb has criticised for still treating the actual participants as faceless units.

Perhaps the most sustained attempt in recent labour history to combine 'insight and imagination as well as discipline' is E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class,* and part of the intention of that book can be seen in the introductory comment:

> I am seeking to rescue the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the "obsolete" hand-loom weaver, the "Utopian" artisan, and even the deluded follower of Joanna Southcott, from the enormous condescension of posterity. . . Their aspirations were valid in terms of their own experience; and, if they were casualties of history, they remain, condemned in their own lives, as casualties.

This study attempts, in its own way, to emulate that intention. By using a literary critical approach, I hope to get close to the "lives" of some participants in the long making of the 'labour movement', and by employing that approach within a sociology of literature framework I intend not to lose sight of the nature and, particularly, some of the problems of that 'movement'.

It is not accidental that Thompson's work in part overlaps with, parallels, or draws upon some aspects of literary criticism. Thompson has written, for example, a major study of William Morris, and even in *The Making of the English Working Class* an interest in the creative literature of the period is strongly present. One specific parallel with the work. of a literary critic can be usefully instanced here. Thompson formulates an important conclusion of his work in the comment: 'By 1832 there were strongly based and self-conscious working-class institutions, . . working-class intellectual traditions, working-class community patterns, and a working-class structure of feeling'. The term 'structure of feeling' is apparently derived from Raymond Williams's *The Long Revolution*, where Williams writes:

> The most difficult thing to get hold of, in studying any past period, is this felt sense of the quality of life at a particular time and place: a sense of the ways in which the particular activities combined into a way of thinking and living. . . The term I would suggest to describe this is structure of feeling: it is as firm and definite as 'structure' suggests, yet it operates in the most delicate and least tangible parts of our activity.

Williams's work, too, crosses the boundaries between literary criticism, cultural history and history in general, yet the sensibility

operating in his work is primarily that of the literary critic (a position for which Thompson has criticised him). Williams's approach, indeed, parallels a great deal of Lukács's critical method, and one brief example from Lukács might illustrate the grounds for expecting connections to emerge between literary criticism and labour history

In his *The Historical Novel,* Lukács writes of the difficulty, for the novelist, of presenting an historical period not just in terms of material details but in the psychological depiction of character; he praises Scott for conveying exactly 'the quality of the inner life, the morality, capacity for sacrifice, steadfastness, etc., peculiar to a given age', for his 'ability to translate elements of economic and social change into human fates, into an altered psychology.' Clearly, we have here something akin to the combined interests of the historian and the literary critic – an interest both in the material 'facts' of a period and (to use Williams's term) the structure of feeling of that period. The analyses which follow, in Part Two of this study, also attempt to combine both interests, but by almost reversing the procedure Lukács sees as characteristic of Scott. My own approach could perhaps be formulated as trying to 'translate' the 'human fate', the 'psychology', of these individuals, as expressed in their autobiographies, into 'elements of economic and social change'.

This, however, raises again the problem of method, the mode of translation. For what is common to Lukács and most of his disciples is a curious lack of what, in England at least, has been taken to be the primary task of literary criticism: a close attention to, a detailed reading and exposition of, the actual language of the literary text. And there is perhaps a complementary absence, in some of the work done recently in social history, in the use generally made of autobiographies: although memoirs, diaries and autobiographical writings have been extensively cited as sources for the understanding of and knowledge about a period, little attention has been paid to the kind of document an autobiography is.

Autobiographies have tended to be taken by historians as basically narratives of what happened, more or less biased or inaccurate, or as providing anecdotes of 'human interest' to enliven a dull page. But they have not often been recognised as constituting a rather peculiar 'genre' in their own right. This is partly, perhaps, because there has been very little work done on the nature of autobiography in general and until recently much of the work available has lacked any adequate method or awareness of the problems of critical method: 'close reading', for example, has rarely been practised in relation to autobiographies, and no satisfactory criteria have been established for critically assessing an autobiography. The emphasis has been on

somewhat skimpy surveys, and to some extent on theoretical considerations. Moreover, the theoretical assumptions underlying the various surveys have been implicit rather than articulated. These problems arise partly because autobiography is a form of writing which seems to slide between standard categories: it hovers between 'history' and 'creative literature', 'non-fiction' and 'fiction'.

As such, of course, autobiography would seem to constitute, *a priori*, an area of inquiry which invites a sociology of literature approach: a form of writing which is explicitly concerned with recounting the 'life' (and, often, 'times') of an author perhaps offers itself as an area in which the connections between that life, those times and the written work itself might be closely established, or at least usefully explored. This ambivalent status of autobiography need not necessarily make the application of literary-critical techniques inappropriate.

Recent studies in psycho-analysis and sociolinguistics, for example, and even in political philosophy, have illustrated the amenability of rather unexpected discourses and texts to a close reading approach: it is increasingly clear that what is said and how exactly it is said can reveal a great deal, in very precise ways, about a person's unconscious problems and self-understanding, and even his or her class-position. I do not feel competent, or confident, enough in the techniques emerging from these fields, or in the more technical attempts at linking criticism with methods developed in linguistics, to want to employ them in any directly derivative way, but at least a close reading of autobiographies might help to counter-balance some of the less closely-focussed treatments of autobiographies by historians. Indeed, the more traditional historian's approach to this body of material can be left to others. I have tried to concentrate upon the actual text and to relate the self-portrait expressed in the text as a whole to wider contexts, rather than directly to the 'real' biographical details of each author's life — a point I am concerned to stress.

The method I have adopted, then, has been to concentrate upon what is actually said in each autobiography as a whole: to try to understand and make clear any significant pattern or unity in the work. This has involved a close analysis of any characteristic features of the writer's style and an examination of the overall structure of each autobiography. I have also tried to suggest ways in which style and structure are related both to each other and to other facets of each author: the political positions he (my examples were all men) depicts himself as holding, the general position he occupied in the social structure, and some features of the time, and sometimes place, in which he lived.

A further connection or 'homology' which emerged in the course of comparing the results of each particular analysis is the correlation between these various features and the problems of political organisation facing the working class at different stages during the nineteenth century. The significance of this last point is discussed in Part Three, the Conclusion, together with some further comments on points raised in this Introduction.

There are, of course, other areas upon which this study might be seen as impinging —for example, those of literary and cultural history. Autobiography as a genre seems uniquely involved in a great many aspects of nineteenth-century English culture. The term itself only comes into general use in the early part of the century. Both Wordsworth and Coleridge eventually conclude their respective searches for a major philosophical poem and a *magnum opus* in autobiographical form, in *The Prelude* and the *Biographia Literaria*. Hazlitt's notion of "sympathy" is directly appropriate to the process involved in reading another's account of their life. Carlyle constructs *Sartor Resartus* as a fragmented autobiography of Herr Teufelsdrockh, and even coins the phrase 'our auto-biographical age' to characterise his own period. The development of the dramatic monologue has clear affinities with the autobiographical mode — as Robert Langbaum has remarked, 'the 'poetry of experience' must to some extent be autobiographical for both reader and author.' The development of the complex autobiographical novel, from Hogg's *Confessions of A Justified Sinner* to Thackeray's *History of Henry Esmond* is a marked feature of the century. The debate about 'realism' in the novel overlaps with an interest in other people's lives and includes at times an insistence upon authors writing only from their own experience. The demand for 'sincerity' becomes generalised, and is often interpreted in the narrow sense of writing from personal experience. The interest in various forms of 'alien' life — peasants, foreign countries, provincial life, etc. — can include and provide a context for a developing interest in the actual lives of 'the working classes', whether mediated through others, in novels, Blue Books or Mayhew, or directly recounted by workers themselves in their autobiographies. None of these connections can be traced in detail within the bounds of this study, but that general context is worth bearing in mind as the complex background against which the autobiographies analysed were written and first read.

Finally, I emphasise that the contribution of the literary critic in these interrelated fields can only be tentative, and that, correspondingly, my debt to non-literary students of the period, particularly to historians, is very great indeed. In taking the results of their work and seeking to make some new connections within and

across the period, I hope I have not distorted their findings.

The analyses that follow are deliberately presented as separate pieces of work, as examinations of specific texts. The conclusions suggested in the third part are attempts simply to indicate some points which may be relevant to the labour historian, to those interested in some of the problems originally raised by Lukács, to literary critics concerned with problems of method and with the nature of 'writing' itself – for example, the question of the boundaries which delineate 'fiction' from other forms of writing. .But despite the brevity of this study, I hope that the ramifications which I think are implied have not been left too implicit.

*

Chapter 1: Samuel Bamford
'groping in a mental and political twilight'

i) Aspects of the historical context

ii) A representative life

iii) Known communities and strangers

iv) A limited politics

v) Politics or autobiography?

vi) A passive style

vii) Elements of form and relationship

viii) Finale and conversion

ix) Conclusion

Unless otherwise specified, page references are to Bamford's *Passages*, 1843, 2v, printed for the author by J. Heywood, , cited as I & II with page numbers. Other works quoted from include *Early Days (ED)*, *Dialect,* and *Walks*. See the Primary Bibliography for details.

> The great changes which have taken place in the nature of employment in the manufacturing districts of South Lancashire, since the publication of Collier's 'View of the Lancashire Dialect', have not only caused the old appearances of the country to pass away, but they have altered nearly everything appertaining to, or resulting from, the life and condition of man. At the time when Tim Bobbin was spending his jovial and facetious days at Milnrow, such a thing as a cotton or woollen factory was not in existence . . . working hours, whether at the loom or on the farm, were, as compared with those of modern operatives and labourers, spent in leisure. There was often great irregularity in their observance of working hours, and their duration varied much, according to the wants, or habits, of individual workers, or of families.
>
> But soon a change was destined to come over this scene of homely labour and plenteous living. In 1769, a patent was taken out for a machine to spin cotton by rollers; in 1770 the spinning-jenny was patented; in 1785 appeared improved carding, drawing, and roving frames; after which came the willow, the scutching-machine, and the lapping-frame. In 1779 the mule-jenny was invented, and in 1785 Watt had completed his steam-engine. Then came a wonderful facility of production, and a proportionate decrease of the cost, whence followed an increase of demand, an increase of employment, an increase of population, a crowding towards the great hive, of many people of all industrial classes, and from all parts of the kingdom and the world. Next, as a consequence, followed the breaking up of old associations and the formation of new ones; the abandonment of old habits; the giving up of old customs; new modes of dress became common; new modes of living were adopted; new subjects of thinking were started; new words for the expression of thought were introduced, and from that time the old dialect, with the old customs of the country and the old fashions, has been gradually receding towards oblivion.

Bamford's compressed account, in his *Dialect* (pp. iii, viii-x), of the many and interconnected changes in South Lancashire at the end of the 18th century can be supplemented and paralleled by the comments of contemporary observers and later historians, though he makes the essential, rich, connections.

Bamford was born in Middleton, near Manchester, in 1788; in 1789 there were no power-looms in Manchester and only one spinning mill driven by steam; the first power-loom was introduced into Manchester in 1790. The next few decades saw the immense expansion of the cotton industry: in 1781, 5 million pounds of raw cotton was imported; by 1820 the figure was 150 million pounds. England as a whole was still predominantly rural and agricultural, but though the new industrial developments advanced fairly slowly, Middleton—Bamford's birth-place—was one of the areas in which, by 1812, they were concentrated.

The new factories first replaced the older modes of spinning rather than weaving: in 1819 in the Manchester area there were 66 spinning mills, employing 20,000 workers (2,000 male operatives, with 18,000 female and child labourers) but also an estimated 40,000 hand-loom weavers still working in cottage-industry conditions. Individual factories were relatively small—even by 1832 the average number of employees in each was only 400, though two mills employed more than 1,000—but the size of the total population in the local towns had increased dramatically. Contemporary accounts of the combined population of Manchester and Salford give 19,839 in 1757, 27,246 in 1773, over 50,000 by 1788, between 65,000 and 74,000 by 1791—the faltering later estimates themselves indicative of the sense of uncontrollable expansion.

Whatever the exact figures, an estimate that Manchester's population increased sevenfold between 1750 and 1820 would probably not exaggerate too wildly. The total population of England was increasing at about 15% each decade in the early l9th century; by 1811 almost one-sixth of the entire population of England lived in the textile areas of Lancashire, Yorkshire and Cheshire, with Lancashire second only to Middlesex in population, and Manchester and Liverpool the only English towns apart from London (already 1 million) to number 90-100,000 inhabitants.

Those who flooded into the Manchester area during this expansion, many of them Irish, were, of course, 'strangers' to one another and to the local inhabitants. The sudden presence of numerous 'strangers' could always alarm the authorities, but the permanent immigration of so many newcomers naturally caused deep difficulties also for the local workers.

We can grasp one aspect of these difficulties by tracing the history of local agitation. Manchester had been generally regarded as Jacobite in the 1740s, but from 1760 to 1790 the predominant local feeling was Tory. During these years there were local food-riots, for example in 1757, and some traditional 'collective bargaining by riot' and machine-

breaking, but from 1789 local clashes began to take on a more directly political character, with the formation both of the Church and King Club, against the Dissenting petitioners for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, and of the Manchester Constitutional Society. Donald Read describes the main shift thereafter as from loyal mob in 1792 to anti-loyal mob by 1819, but as well as the transfer of allegiance we can mark the movement from 'pre-industrial crowd' to a relatively organised opposition movement. There were traditional food-riots in 1797 and some attempts at organisation in 1799 in response to the flour-shortage from 1796 to 1800, but when the next bad harvests came, in 1808-12, we can see a new element in the presence of Major Cartwright and Lord Brougham at the trial of the Manchester 'Luddites' of 1812.

In 1808 the weavers had shown further signs of self-organisation: in protest against the dropping of the minimum-wage Bill, 10,000 weavers had assembled peacefully on St. George's Field to demonstrate, only to be dispersed by troops. By 1811-12 there was an increasing number of local working-class meetings, to petition Parliament on various issues, to meet delegates from Ireland, even to discuss a general 'turn-out'; 'secret committees' of workers were also reported to be at work.

In 1816 the organised groups established the first provincial Hampden Clubs, at Royton, near Oldham, in August, and in Manchester on October 28th; on December 15th a meeting of delegates at Middleton sent out 'missionaries' to other northern areas; by March 1817 there were forty Hampden Clubs in the Manchester area, with about 8,000 members, and a local radical newspaper, the *Manchester Political Register*, had been founded. On March 10th a mass-meeting of 12,000, prelude to the Blanketeers' March, was cleared by dragoons. In 1818 the agitation concentrated on immediate economic issues: 20,000 Manchester and Stockport spinners struck on July 18th, and their strike lasted till the arrest of the spinners' committee on August 29th and an attack on Gray's factory in Manchester on September 2nd. On August 31st the weavers also struck but despite well-attended and organised meetings on September 1st, 2nd and 3rd, the weavers' strike fizzled out on September 4th, when a march of strikers from Manchester to Ashton met Sir John Byng's troops and immediately 'lowered their colours and went home'

The spinners, under their radical political leaders, Bagguley and Drummond, attempted to form a General Union, but the weavers, rejecting Bagguley at a mass meeting, remained a-political. Only in 1819 did the weavers take up a political stance: at a mass meeting on June 21st, called to consider mutual assistance for relief or emigration,

their own leaders, Saxton and Walker, persuaded them to consider the need for Parliamentary reform as well.

By that time there were enough local 'Political Protestant' societies, modelled on the Methodist-style 'class' structure of the Stockport Union for the Promotion of Human Happiness (founded October 1818), for a delegates' meeting representing twenty-eight societies to be held on June 7th, and for a number of mass meetings to be organised throughout the area. In August 1819 the radical *Manchester Observer* reached its highest circulation (4,000 copies) and had a network of northern agents.

The loyalists were naturally also active: on July 16th they formed an Armed Association; on July 24th Wroe, the *Manchester Observer* editor, was charged with seditious libel. On August 16th the two forces met—at 'the Massacre of Peterloo'.

After Peterloo the radical movement in the area split and declined, to revive again briefly in 1826 and then in the 1830s. In 1831, with average wages down to less than 12/- a week, the Manchester mill operatives turned again towards politics; even the hand-loom weavers, by then declining in numbers, could be described as inclined towards 'revolution' rather than reform. The stage was set for Chartism in Manchester.

*

There are a number of points to be emphasised here. Throughout the period, there is a shift from a small, relatively 'known' and homogeneous working community to a large, new kind of conurbation, in which many of the inhabitants were, in a double sense, strangers. By 1841 the number of Irish in Manchester, for example, was equal to its total population in the 1770s. For any radical movement to emerge in that context there had to be development of organisational and tactical forms: the older forms, of relatively spontaneous riot and communication by word of mouth, were replaced, in a long process, by reliance on disciplined and co-ordinated meetings, organisational committees, and newspaper-circulation—one of the earliest signs of the emergence of local Chartism was the transformation in September 1830 of the *Manchester and Salford Advertiser* into a working class radical paper. But at the same time the local authorities had to re-organise their responses to agitation. The local 'police-force' was inherited from a parish-situation: in 1812, for example, Oldham had only two regular constables.

Apart from the building up of a regular police, the authorities had two main resources in times of trouble: an attempt to match numbers with numbers—in May 1812, for example, General Maitland in

Lancashire commanded 79 infantry companies, 18 troops of horse, and two artillery detachments, totalling 5,500 infantry and 1,400 horse, while in the Salford Hundred alone 1,500 special constables were enrolled, about ten per cent of the adult male population. Or, secondly, an attempt to infiltrate the radical groups with spies and informers, relying precisely on the fact that so many people in the area could no longer know the background or credentials of a stranger. And of course the loyalists, while organising their own associations, attempted to prevent the development of the working class attempts at organisation—in 1813, for example, Hay, chairman of the Manchester and Salford district bench, proposed a Bill to regulate Friendly Societies.

ii : a representative life?

That, among so many thousands in the Manchester area, Samuel Bamford should have produced the autobiography by which we know him itself requires some kind of explanation. In 1814, for example, another Samuel Bamford was shot dead in a Luddite raid at Nottingham; he is merely a name, otherwise unknown, whereas Samuel Bamford of Middleton is referred to over thirty times in Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class.*

Why autobiographies are written is never fully amenable to explanation, but at least we can partly grasp how Bamford became a point at which the general process described above received individual expression. For many of the currents and strands in that complex history intersected in Bamford's life.

His two paternal great-grandfathers were James Bamford and Samuel Cheetham, respectively a small farmer and a watch-maker (*ED*, p. 12); the former was deprived, claims Bamford, of his right to the Bamford Hall estate (*ED*, p. 11); the latter was chiefly remembered for his violent support of the King when the Scots army reached Manchester in 1745 (*ED*, p. 15). The same year, Bamford's maternal grandfather, a master shoemaker named Jeffrey Battersbee, was arrested on a High Treason charge for helping the Pretender's forces (*ED*, p. 21). His paternal grandfather, Daniel Bamford, was by that time a small farmer and weaver (*ED*, p. 12); when Bamford himself was born his father, also a Daniel, was simply a weaver, though of muslin, 'at that time considered a fine course of work, and requiring a superior hand' (*ED*, p. l) In his immediate lineage, then, we can trace a representative decline from independent farming to cottage weaving, cut across at different generations by marriage with the daughters of relatively superior craftsmen. The move from rural to urban districts is parallel: from Thornham to Middleton and, soon, to Manchester.

A radical element can also be traced: the Bamford family was split in the Civil War, and Bamford claimed descent from the brother who fought against the king and was therefore dispossessed at the Restoration (I, p. 52); Jeffrey Battersbee's clash with the king of his day occasions the remark from Bamford: 'The rebel blood, it would seem, after all, was the more impulsive; it got the ascendancy—and I was born a Radical' (*ED*, p. 22). But apart from a consciousness of this strand in his ancestry, Bamford had the immediate example of his father and uncle Thomas: in the 1790s, under the influence of 'Pain's [*sic*] *Rights of Man'*, his two relatives were members of the 'small band' of Middleton 'Jacobins' who were 'supporters of Parliamentary Reform, as it was then advocated by the Duke of Richmond, Mr. Pitt, and other distinguished characters' (*ED*, p. 43), and the attacks on such local radicals were among Bamford's earliest memories (*ED*, pp. 44-48).

His father's influence was certainly operative in another important area: he was, briefly, a schoolmaster (*ED*, p. 4), and Bamford proudly describes how his father was 'considerably imbued with book knowledge, particularly of a religious kind; understood arithmetic; had some acquaintance with astronomy; was a vocal and instrumental musician, singing from the book and playing on the flute; he was likewise an occasional composer of music, and introduced several of his pieces amongst the religious body with which he was connected; he was also a writer of verses' (*ED*, p. 2), and 'the author of several moral essays in verse' (*ED*, p. 7). Bamford even quotes a hymn and a political song written by his father in the 1790s (*ED*, pp. 8-10).

The religious element mentioned is strong in his ancestry: his grandfather Daniel's home was, Bamford claims, 'the first that opened at Middleton for the reception of Methodist preachers; and John and Charles Wesley, John Nelson, Thomas Taylor, and many of the first promulgators of their doctrines, had addressed their humble and simple hearers on the floor of that ruined dwelling' (*ED,* p. 13); his father became a Methodist after an 'irregular youth' (*ED*, p. 3), but in his Jacobin phase 'left the society of Methodists, but to the doctrines of John Wesley . . continued an adherent as long as [he] lived' (*ED,* p. 43); Bamford's cousins remained Methodists 'of the old primitive earnest cast', 'the old John Wesley caste' (*ED,* pp. 71-78, 100). Whatever the overall interaction between Methodism and radicalism—and the issue is complex—Bamford's Methodism, as we shall see, probably did contribute something to his autobiographical account of his personal radicalism.

Bamford's own early life continues some of the trajectories visible here. He was born just at the start of what William Radcliffe called

'the golden age' of the weaving trade, 1788 to 1803, and about 1797 he himself became a weaver (*ED*, p. 115). But for Bamford that was part of a return to his origins: in 1793 his father had been appointed manager of a 'manufactory of cotton goods' at Strangeways Workhouse, and soon after Workhouse Governor (*ED*, p. 50f); a small-pox epidemic in 1795 killed Bamford's mother, uncle Thomas and his younger sister and brother (*ED*, p. 61f); after his father's subsequent re-marriage Bamford moved, back to Middleton to live in his uncle William's family and 'never resided' again with his father (*ED*, p. 96). While in Manchester he had already attended Manchester Grammar School, but his father prevented him entering the 'latin class'; as Bamford remarks: 'Had the threshold of the classics been once crossed . . a course of life, far different from the one I have pursued, would have been marked out before me' (*ED*, p. 79f, 92, 93). But the return to Middleton also meant a return to the simpler forms of education he had known earlier—local Methodist schools and Sunday Schools (*ED*, p. 79, 106f). Though many of the Manchester Sunday Schools were still intended 'to teach the duties of humility and submission to superiors', at least Bamford's brand of 'real old Armenian Methodists . . thought it no desecration of the Sabbath to enable the rising generation, on that day, to write the Word of God as well as read it' (*ED*, p. 106).

In 1803, as the 'golden age' ended, Bamford left the mixture of weaving and schooling of his stay at his cousins, and went to live with his sister in Salford, again attending briefly John Holt's Methodist School in Oldham Street. Shortly after, he began a succession of jobs as a warehouseman in Manchester, with an interlude as a stableboy on one employer's farm in Prestwich (*ED*, pp. l87f, 200f). The ease with which that particular employer, Mr. Robinson, was simultaneously manufacturer, wholesaler and farmer, spreading his interests from Bury to Manchester and Prestwich, is to some extent paralleled by the ease with which Bamford, living in Greengate and working in Macdonald's Lane (now Lower Cannon Street) or High Street, in the centre of Manchester, speaks of his recreation at this time entirely in terms of the countryside, 'lonely walks in those pleasant indulating *[sic]* pastures', 'country strolls at eventide' (e.g. *ED*, pp. 196f, 207, 211). The swelling Manchester was still almost an intrusion upon a rural setting.

Nor did Bamford find it difficult to move back to Middleton and set himself up as a weaver when 'trade was going remarkably well' (*ED*, p. 225) or to return to warehousing when he tired of a sailor's life after 'some half dozen trips betwixt Shields and London' in 1807 (*ED*, pp. 246, 276). He remained a warehouseman in Manchester till 1813, even

after settling with his wife, Mima, in Middleton after their marriage in 1810. Between 1813 and 1816 he was a putter-out to the Middleton weavers, and even dabbled in bookselling (*ED*, p. 311), but by the time he became involved in the Hampden Clubs he was settled as a weaver.

What is significant for this study, however, is not these bare bones of his life, but his own experience and expression of them. Before we examine the actual form that Bamford's autobiographical writings took, we must first analyse the elements of his experience that are given particular emphasis in his work and see how these relate to the general historical experience sketched above.

iii : known communities and strangers

In his *Walks in South Lancashire* (1844) Bamford includes a short, imaginary, conversation between Sir George Head, author of *A Home Tour in the Manufacturing Districts,* and a Lancashire 'local'; it is entitled "A Stranger in Lancashire" and begins with the stranger inquiring the way:

> "Pray, can you inform me which is the nearest way to Littleborough?"
> "Wot, dun yo myen past th' Chanters, at th' Lone-foote?"
> "I do not know where I should go past, sir."
> "Oh! yo dunno' know, dun yo? but I'll goo wi' yo, an' show yo. See yo then, yo mun goo deawn th' Little-feelt, an' deawn th' Yeaw-bonk, an' streight deawn th' Wood, and yo'n soon be at th' Littleborough. Wot, aryo sum mack ov a wool-felley, or summat?"
> Stranger:- "No sir; I am not in trade."
> "Why, I thought yo hadn bin. Why, we'er dun yo come fro, then?"
> "I come from London."
> "Fro Lunnun, dun yo?"
> Stranger:- "I do."
> "Dun yo know Peel, then?"
> Stranger:- "Which Peel?"
> "Why, Peel at belungs to this lond."
> "I am not aware that I do."
> "Why, but he lives i' LunnunI"
> "In what part of the town does he reside?"
> "Th' teawn! he never lift i' Ratchda in his lyve, mon."
> "I mean in what part of London does he live?"
> "Nay, I know nowt obeawt tat, but he lives i' Lunnun."
>
> (*Walks*, pp. 268-269)

In this brief exchange the contrast of dialect with 'standard' English is an index to a deeper contrast; the old farmer lives in a known community, its paths and inhabitants familiar and taken for granted; for him it is difficult to recognise that a man may be a stranger, unfamiliar with that scene, and even more difficult to grasp that London is not a similarly 'known community' for its inhabitants. For the stranger, London is the focus of a quite different community: England as a whole, with the capital as 'the town' and such places as Lancashire as 'the manufacturing districts'; for the farmer, Rochdale is 'the town' and London is merely some other Rochdale. That clash of experiences, separated out in this dialogue, was in Bamford's case an element in a continuing internal dialogue.

Bamford began by inhabiting a known community. For example, of a motley group of seven prisoners he can remark that 'three of the men were personally known to me; a fourth I knew only by name; and the others I had never seen before that morning' (I, p. 98; cf. p. 94), while a prisoner suddenly thrust into his carriage is simply introduced to the reader as 'George Howarth, for that was the name of my new companion, was a decent, labouring, married man, of Royton, and was about six feet four inches in height' and is thereafter simply "George" (I, p. 84); when he lists the Middleton victims of Peterloo it is as a group of people personally known to him (I, pp. 224-5). The local forces of law and order, and his employers, are known people, not distant figures (e.g. I, pp. 80-1, 202). He had once clashed with the local authorities over non-payment of a maintenance order (*ED*, pp. 230-2) and his own family were intermarried with local employers (*ED*, p. 5); moreover, the radical meetings and perhaps too the joint political meetings of masters and men may have helped to extend Bamford's own known community. But the overwhelming sense conveyed by the way Bamford presents Middleton to the reader in *Passages* is as a shared known community — even dates are almost taken for granted while he is writing about activities in Middleton or Manchester: the full date is given when he recounts his departure for London ('Sunday, the 30th of March, 1817', I, p. 95) but most dates before then omit the year or are in the form of, for example, 'the following Monday'.

Early Days is more explicit about the nature of Middleton, describing the personal relationships of masters, putters-cut and weavers (*ED*, pp. 117-125), and emphasising Bamford's deep home-sickness for Middleton when he moved to Manchester (*ED*, ch. viii), but perhaps the most telling indication of the nature of the community that Bamford knew comes in an incident after Peterloo:

> I found Redford's mother bathing his wound with warm milk and water, and to please her, he said it was easier. It was a clean gash of about six inches in length and quite through the shoulder blade. She yearned, and wept afresh, when she saw the severed bone gaping in the wound. She asked who did it? and Tom mentioned a person; he said he knew him well; and she, sobbing, said she also knew him, and his father and mother before him; and she prayed God not to visit that sin upon the head of him who did it, but to change his heart and bring him to repentance. That prayer had well-nigh touched my heart also, but Tom rapped out one of another sort, to which I incontinently, as may be supposed, added my "Amen". (I, pp. 214-15)

Like the farmer in *Walks*. Bamford at times seemed to presume an extension of his own experience — he lists 'Mr Johnson, of Smedley Cottage; Mr Moorhouse of Stockport; Mr Carlile of London; Mr John Knight of Manchester' (I, p. 205) as if Smedley Cottage were the same kind of place as London, or even Manchester; he suggests that an early local informer, William Wilson, who 'left the country . . and was next heard of as a police officer at London' might well be 'a man of his name, whose marks were, S.38' serving in the London force 'recently' —that is, about twenty-three years later (I, p. 10). He attributes his own kind of personal knowledge to Hunt during the large Palace Yard meeting and demonstration on January 28th, 1817: 'He seemed to know almost every man of them, and his confidence in, and entire mastery over them, made him quite at ease' (I, p. 19); he was correspondingly surprised at first to find that he, Bamford, had to identify himself to the London relief committee— it had to be explained to him 'how necessary it was, in a great place like London, to be quite certain as to the persons with whom they transacted business' (II, pp. 49-50).

Bamford, however, had not only to learn that other places were not 'known communities'; he also had to negotiate the breakdown of his own. He can recognise that he himself may be a 'stranger' to the London radical meetings and need to be informed as to who 'two of the most influential leaders of the London operative reformers', Watson and Preston, were (I, pp. 24-5), but when 'a stranger whom [he] did not know' becomes one of the 'chief movers' 'at work during [his] absence', 'exciting to, and carrying on, private meetings, and suspicious intrigues in our neighbourhood', then Bamford feels distinctly uneasy (I, p. 155). Even after Peterloo he finds it natural to react in a meeting by arguing that:

> I had sent for men whom I knew, but they came not; strangers came whose faces I had never seen before, and I could not act with such; neither was it to be expected that I should. (I, p. 219)

In part, Bamford's reaction was justified by the fear of strangers being informers — but that fear itself could only be generated in a situation where the community was ceasing to be closed

It is easy, in fact, to overlook the elements in Bamford of sheer inability to grasp others simply as strangers— a facility long since acquired by the present urbanised population. He will not speak till spoken to by strangers, even though on one occasion he realises that they are 'some of the London politicians of the working class' (II, p. 136); in London he was 'half-inclined to believe also, that the people [he] met seemed as if they knew [he] was pennyless' (II, p. 140). The experience of London he recounts in *Early Days* remained for a long time a shaping factor in his outlook:

> . . the men and women themselves formed an apparently unceasing current of human beings, the ever-changing hue and character of which, confused my head—wearied my attention—and made me wishful to see no more. (*ED*, p. 241)

In *Passages* he can still use "Londonish" simply as an adjective for 'the people, their houses, and their manners' (II, p. 132); he was particularly appalled by the London slums and underworld and his immediate reaction was to wish (I, pp. 151-2) :

> Oh! let me live afar from scenes like these,
> Where the winds bend the giant armed trees;
> Bask on my own dear banks of new blown flowers,
> When thirsty sol, hath supp'd the morning showers.

The quality of the poetry hardly captures the quality of the experience. In later life he managed to live in London for a few years, as a minor clerk at Somerset House (1851—55); by that time he had learned to live, to some extent, as a 'stranger', and before we examine the underlying political importance of this element in Bamford, some aspects of this process of learning must be noticed.

A central feature in Bamford's experience of his known community was his reliance on 'friendship': he asserts friendship to be one of the characteristics of his own class (I, p. 50), and the experience of the power of friendliness had been an early part of his make-up (*ED*, p. 70); his natural reaction on meeting again a co-delegate whom at first

he scarcely recognises is to refer to him very soon after as his 'old friend' (I, pp. 156-7). But his friendships gradually soured: some 'friends' spread the rumour that he was a spy (I, p. 160f); Hunt left his co-defendants to their own resources at the trial, snubbed Bamford, and slandered Carlile (II, pp. 72f, 88f, 85f); Bamford's fellow local radicals left him almost without financial assistance for his trial (II, p. 104f), and the London radicals mainly forgot their imprisoned colleagues (II, p. 165). Even in prison with Healey and Johnson, quarrels, arguments and suspicion 'at length, entirely put a stop to all confidence and friendly feeling betwixt [them] and rendered [Bamford] . . a stranger to the society of [his] two fellow-prisoners' (II, p. 180). He had already had the experience of being forced, briefly, to act as a 'stranger' in his own neighbourhood, in disguising himself after Peterloo (I, p. 213), but to acknowledge all men as basically 'strangers' was a difficult process. We can see the recognition emerging in his realisation that the 'great men' of the country, the Members of Parliament, might be 'some three or four hundreds of the most ordinary-looking men [he] had ever beheld at one view', while he himself, as a prisoner, could become the centre of attention for both ordinary people and the 'genteel' and 'respectable' (cf. I, pp. 26, 99, 275). His description of Manchester as a play comes close to an awareness that roles in urban society are based not on personal knowledge but on how we appear to one another, through endless mediations:

> If any one wishes to see a play performed he has only to walk the streets of Manchester, or any other of our large towns, and he may behold the perfection of either tragedy or comedy enacted by performers who need neither prompter, call-boy, nor rehearsal; but all coming and going as regularly as if the piece were a play "got up" and "put on the stage", as the phrase is, "put on ready for presentation". The scenes are admirably painted—the machinery perfect in its operations, of wonderful construction, and sometimes of most awful effect. The actors might have been made for the performance of their several parts, so aptly do they go through them; whilst the dresses, decorations, and all the accessories of the piece, are sure to be wonderfully befitting. And with such a stage as this, with its ever-varying realitie [*sic*] before our eyes, who can require sham repetition as an after-part? Not I at any rate. (ED, pp. 209-210)

He is quite explicit at one point about the need to play a role where one is a stranger: after being refused lodgings at an inn, he advises that:

> A foot traveller, if he is really desirous to obtain lodgings, should never stand asking about them. He should walk into a good room,—never into the common tap room,—put his dusty feet under a table,—ring the bell pretty smartly, and order something to eat and drink, and not speak in the humblest of tones. He will be served quickly and respectfully . . After his repast, he should take his pipe or cigar if he be a smoker, and whether he be or not, he should drink, chat, and make himself quite at ease until bed-time; when, all he has to do, will be to call the chamber-maid and ask her to light him to bed. That will be done as a matter of course . . (II, p. 120)

Later he makes a firm distinction between the role he is prepared to play among strangers and the identity he demands within a close community; he explains why he has suddenly, while still a prisoner in transit, withdrawn his previous acquiescence to being chained:

> I said it was not a sudden resolve on my part, for I never intended to enter Lincoln with the chains on. I cared but little how I appeared in London or the country through which we had passed, and where I was, as I should probably remain, a perfect stranger; but I knew the consequences of a first appearance in a seemingly degraded state, before persons with whom we must remain twelve months. (II, p. 169)

Such deliberate role-playing already acknowledges that friendliness and direct personal relations may have to be abandoned outside the known community. In fact by the time of the handcuffing episode Bamford had already —in the King's Bench prison, a microcosm of the society outside, with every comfort and privilege available at a price — admitted that

> each man was thinking, acting, reading, resting, singing, praying, eating, drinking, weeping, or smiling for himself, and his own concerns; just as in the wide world outside. (II, p. 164)

iv : a limited politics

There is, of course, already a political 'position' implicit in some features of Bamford's allegiance to a known community and the way that allegiance crumbles, but we can make his political stance more explicit—bearing in mind that his writing is retrospective and includes

a critique of his early politics.

The most obvious political options adopted by Bamford are negative: his opposition to the Blanketeers' March, to the plans for "making a Moscow of Manchester" and later for assassinating the Cabinet, and in general to proposals for "revolution" (I, pp. 30, 38, 76, 122-3). His opposition is often linked to a suspicion of planted agitators and informers (I, pp. 10f, 38, 76f) but this at times shades into a distrust of all 'professional' agitators (I, pp. 25, 36, 167). Yet there is a tension in Bamford's attitude on this point: he excuses his own phase of radicalism, in contrast to the Chartist phase, by arguing that

> We had not any of our own rank with whom to advise for the better,—no man of other days who had gone through the ordeal of experience; and whose judgement might have directed our self-devotion. (I, p. 153)

But in fact he rejects the approach of Thomas Bacon, the septuagenarian involved in the Pentridge rising (I, p. 156f) and dismisses Watson, Preston, Hooper, Benbow and Evans as "the blind leading the blind", as 'wordy and intemperate' (I, pp. 25, 126). It is not so much experienced leaders that Bamford asks for, as leaders who will give his own kind of political advice. The passage quoted above continues:

> . . and have instructed us that, before the reform we sought, could be obtained and profited by, there must be another, —a deeper reform,—emerging from our hearts, and first blessing our households, by the production of every good we could possibly accomplish in our humble spheres. (I, pp. 153-4)

But to accept this perspective is to adopt very clearly a specific kind of 'politics'. If we look at Bamford's explicit analyses and proposals we can see their coherence with this stance, and their limits.

The second chapter of *Passages* includes a fairly comprehensive statement of the political aims of Bamford's Hampden Club (I, p. 10):

> . . resolutions were passed declaratory of the right of every male to vote, who paid taxes; that males of 18 should be eligible to vote; that parliaments should be elected annually; that no placeman or pensioner should sit in parliament; that twenty thousand of inhabitants should send a member to the house of commons; and that talent and virtue were the only qualifications necessary.

These 'moderate views and wishes of the reformers' did not, as Bamford approvingly declares, include an insistence on the ballot, nor 'interfere with the house of lords; nor the bench of bishops; nor the working of factories; nor the corn laws; nor the payment of members; nor tithes; nor church rates; nor a score of other matters. .', for in their view 'first obtain annual parliaments, and universal suffrage, and "Whatsoever thou wouldest shall be added thereto".' (I, p. 1l). He also maintains that

> It was not until we became infested by spies, incendiaries, and their dupes—distracting, misleading, and betraying—that physical force was mentioned amongst us. After that our moral power waned; and what we gained by the accession of demagogues, we lost by their criminal violence, and the estrangement of real friends" (I, p. 11).

This position, typically, rests on the 'old' radical analysis in terms of corruption: Bamford's famous *The Union Hymn*, published in the *Manchester Observe*r a week before Peterloo, contains the lines

> Then Britain's Prince shall truly reign;
> His subjects will defend him;
> And, free'd from loath'd corruption's train,
> Bright honour shall attend him.

Those responsible for this corruption are, in general, 'the "boroughmonger crew" (I, p. 25) and Bamford is careful to note how the old upper classes are true gentlemen, compared with this ill-defined new group (cf. I, pp. 91, 104-106, 148, 150). The problem, he asserts to Lord Sidmouth, is that 'his majesty's ministers were [not] fully acquainted with the state of the country, and the condition of the people' because of 'the partial source from whence their information must be derived'; since 'the gentry or what were called the higher classes, were too proud, or too indifferent, to examine minutely, the abodes of the poor and the distressed', the 'interests of many . . tended to elicit from them, distorted or partial statements of facts' (I, p. 144). The implication here is that it is ignorance, and to some extent involuntary ignorance, of the 'higher classes' concerning the poor, that is the core of the problem

The closest Bamford gets to a more adequate analysis is his brief account of the workings of taxation, and the economic dependence of the poor upon property-owner and shop-keeper (I, p. 125), but in general he is prepared to accept that, in Sidmouth's words, "the

present distress of the country arises from unavoidable circumstances; . . that his majesty's ministers will do all they can to alleviate such distress, and . . no violence, of whatever description, will be tolerated" (I, p. 148).

Within that framework anything in the nature of class-conflict is ruled out, and the most that the poor can expect is to 'be content, could they only procure the common necessaries of life by hard labour' (I, p. 144). Since they cannot 'even do that', reform is necessary, but limited reform, as a means to minimal amelioration. And the means towards obtaining reform are also minimal. Bamford's emphasis throughout is on non-violent, law-abiding moral pressure to gain respect, by showing patience and even gratitude (cf. e.g. I, pp. 36, 81, 98, 157, 176f; II, pp. 19, 218-19). His whole aim is attitudinal change: 'For a nation to be free, it is sufficient that she wills it' (I, p. 277), and a change in the attitudes of the masses, towards reason, restraint and self-control, will effect the necessary change in the authorities, towards sympathy and friendliness. Bamford's most extended passage of political advice is worth quoting at length, since it includes many of his most characteristic emphases:

> Mildly and persuasively as a mother entreating, would reason lead us to self-examination, self-control, and self-amendment, as the basis for all public reform. Canst thou not control thyself, and wouldest thou govern a household? Canst not thou govern a household, and yet wouldest thou direct a nation? Come to thine own bosom and home, and there commence a reform, and let it be immediate and effectual. One evening spent in the acquirement of useful knowledge,—in rational conversation, —in the promotion of kindly feelings,—in the restraints of society, —in the comforting of families,—in the blessings of children, and the improvement of their hearts and understandings,—in the devisements of cheerful economy and industry,—in the feeling of mercy towards all God's creatures, and love of all goodness, for his sake; one evening so spent, were to thyself and thy country, worth more than all thou has seen, heard, or done, at Radical or Chartist meetings, since sun-light or torch-light first illumined them.
>
> Instead of wishing to create sudden changes, and to overthrow institutions, it were better that ignorance alone, the fruitful mother of arrogance and hard-heartedness, were pulled down. The masses would be elevated; instruction becoming the hand-maid of God's grace; for it would be his work after all. Whatsoever was offensive to right feeling, or opposed to the well-being of mankind, would

> disappear, and be absorbed in the great uprising of mind. Many who are now but as atoms in the dust, would then become exalted; many would become nobles, in the truest sense; and many would be masters, not so much of others as of themselves; and, affectingly sublime would be the spectacle of that new dominion of light and peace; the aurora of that great day, when, "the lion shall lie down with the lamb."
>
> A virtuous and enlightened people could not be enslaved. Having conquered themselves, where should they find oppression to conquer? (I, pp. 279-80)

Bamford concludes this chapter of poor advice and equally poor rhetoric—the final chapter in volume one of *Passages*—by quoting from his own translation of Beranger's *La Lyonnaise*. ending with the paragraph:

> It is true, the middle and upper ranks have scarcely been just towards you; they have not cultivated that friendship of which you are susceptible, and more worthy than they. Had they done so, you would not have been in the hands you now are. But you can look above this misdirected pride and pity it. The rich have been as unfortunate in their ignorance of your worth, as you have in the absence of their friendship. All ranks have been in error, as it respects their relative obligations, and prejudice has kept them strangers and apart. But the delusion is passing away, like darkness before the sun, and knowledge, against which, gold is powerless, comes like the spreading day, raising the children of toil, and making their sweat drops more honourable than pearls. (I, p. 281)

Bamford's translation of *La Lyonnaise* was published as an antidote to Chartist arguments for 'the wickedly devised) and foolishly attempted "National Holiday" ' in 1839 (II, p. 280, footnote).

*

Between his own phase of radicalism in 1816-1819 and his autobiographical account of that phase, Bamford's position had clearly moved towards an extremely moderate reformism. After his release from Lincoln Castle in 1821 he returned to his weaver's loom; in 1825 he helped to found the Middleton Mechanics' Institute, under Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge auspices; in 1826 he persuaded some local weavers not to join in a loom-breaking outburst and the

same year became a correspondent for *The Manchester Guardian*; in 1832 he was 'compelled to undertake the office of constable' and in 1839 was again a special constable; by that time he was beginning to become slightly involved in the Anti-Corn Law League—just as he was finishing *Passages*.

His various attacks on the Chartists in his writings grow out of this development; much later, in 1864, he could declare that he had never really been opposed to the Chartists, only to "mob law and mob violence", to any 'attempt by individuals to coerce him'; he can even claim to have been prepared to endorse violence if necessary, and include a sympathetic poem entitled "Brandreth's Soliloquy in Prison" in his *Homely Rhymes*, though a burlesque on Feargus O'Connor, and the Beranger translation, are also included. But in the 1840s his position was much more cautious than in the revised *Homely Rhyme*s. His comments on his political position at the time of writing *Passages* are sometimes vague and general (e.g. I, p. 90), but in the final chapter he is more explicit; he lists the political aims that 'all the sufferers . . of whatever class or description, —all who love their country—all who would promote the happiness and prosperity of mankind' should 'unite to procure by peaceful means', as:

> a suffrage co-extensive with direct taxation, — an annual accountability of members to their constituents — cheap food for the hungry— cheap clothing for the naked, — cheap labour, for the industrious,—(we must cut a straight-forward swathe,—we cannot turn aside to leave nooks and corners for classes) cheap rents for the cottager,—cheap rents for the farmer,—cheap education for everyone,— cheap law in our courts,—cheap justice on the bench; and real justice too,—cheap religion, and freedom with it,—a cheap, money-despising, vanity-shunning priesthood,—a cheap, noble-minded, open-handed aristocracy,—elder brothers, and fathers, of the people,—and lastly, or firstly if you will, a cheap government, and a cheap, but firm executive. (II, p 28)

The emphasis on cheapness indicates some confused interest in economic analysis (though 'cheap labour, for the industrious' is almost contradictory), but apart from this final appeal to unity and peaceful methods, the only specific political recommendation he makes in *Passages* as to the means of reform is a revision of his earlier advocacy of annual parliaments; now:

> He would say, let the house of commons, be, like the house of

> lords, indissoluble;—members to render an account of their conduct annually; individual members be liable to be displaced by their constituents, at any time; and elected, displaced, or retained as private servants are, *viz.*: as they do well their duty, or otherwise. The sense of the electors to be taken annually—by ballot in districts; all elections to be by ballot. No hustings: no nomination farce; no mob gatherings; no ruffianism; no demagogism; no canting and deception of the multitudes . . (I, p. 14)

What is significant in this change is the model of community underlying it: that the relationships between the governing and the governed are not those between groups or interests, but between individuals related by personal knowledge; the belated adoption of the ballot is also indicative of this model; now Bamford is prepared to allow all men to remain, 'horizontally', strangers to one another, while their 'vertical' relationships are paternal. What disgusts him about actual elections is the 'mob' element, the crowd as decision-maker (cf. the rhetoric of I, p. 13); it is part of a development which can allow him to argue that:

> Men's habits, thoughts, feelings, wants, and dispositions are so various, that I hardly think it possible for any human means, so far to divest them of their individuality, as to make them work permanently for one common object only. (*Walks*, p. 57)

The only 'mechanism' Bamford can offer for transforming such a situation into that "unity" of "the nation" that he also insists upon is something like a religious conversion (*Walks*, pp. 58-61). But the mechanism that might have, and in practice tried to, overcome this problem, Bamford rejects: the formation of a political movement or organisation based not on the personal relationship of individuals but on impersonal forms of membership. This—emerging in Chartism—Bamford dismisses as 'mob' "coercion".

v : politics or autobiography?

The limits of Bamford's political position reflect a dilemma facing the whole radical movement in the 'transitional' phase of the 1790s to 1830s. The values that the radicals sought to maintain were often, in one sense, regressive: they looked back to a stable community, closed and face-to-face; the forms of organisation they adopted rested in part on that kind of relationship, often inherited from the small organisational forms of religious dissenters. But at the same time, the

need was increasingly recognised for new forms of organisation, appropriate to the generalised relationship of a national radical presence; out of that struggle would begin to be created a new perspective, an elaborated politics, a different version of 'community' to be worked towards.

We can grasp one of the roots of this dilemma, in the specific case of Bamford, if we examine more closely a possible 'break-through' point in his career already glanced at above. Chapter XXXVI of *Passages* vol. I, recounting the close of the day of Peterloo, ends with the sentence:

> . . and now we spent the evening in recapitulating the events of the day, and in brooding over a spirit of vengeance, towards the authors of our humiliation, and our wrong. (I, p. 231)

That bleak word, "wrong", concludes the chapter on a threatening note; Peterloo marked a watershed: to experience that day as a "humiliation" was a different political option from interpreting it as a "wrong". The overtones of the latter gradually come to the fore in the next chapter: 'it was reported that thousands of pikemen were oh the way to Manchester, from Oldham, Middleton, and other surrounding districts', 'all the working people were athirst for revenge, and only awaited the coming of the country folks to attempt a sweeping havock', proposals for the 'immolation of a selected number of the guilty ones' were being discussed, and when Bamford reached Middleton he found that:

> Many of the young men had been preparing arms, and seeking out articles to convert into such. Some had been grinding scythes, others old hatchets, others screw-drivers, rusty swords, pikels, and mop-nails: anything which could be made to cut or stab was pronounced fit for service. But no plan was defined,—nothing was arranged,—and the arms were afterwards reserved for any event that might occur. (I, pp. 214, 216)

On that note the chapter ends, in suspense.

Bamford's own attitude has been carefully presented during the chapter; earlier he had favoured the limited use of defensive cudgels for the meeting, but had been willing to be overruled (I, pp. 192, 197); now two incidents prepare for a possible return to an armed stance. The passage in which Bamford attends the wounded Redford and wavers between the two responses—of neighbourly forgiveness and vengeance—is in this chapter, as is the episode in which Bamford, in

disguise, becomes a temporary stranger to his own community (I, pp. 214-15, 213-14; cf. above). Together, they indicate the ground for an adoption of violent tactics: to accept violence is necessarily to cease relating to one's enemies as neighbours, as known persons, to cease regarding local loyalties as overriding. It is a difficult process to live through or to express. When Bamford returns from his disguised sortie, having heard some proposals of direct personal revenge that 'filled [him] with horror', he simply says:

> What these men sought would not do; and I retired, and put off my dress, more thoughtful than when I took it up. (I, p. 214)

Before the end of the chapter half-a-dozen of the local radicals, including Bamford, have 'agreed to hold a larger meeting the day following' to discuss what is to be done. Bamford's response, as he recounts it in the next chapter, is becoming clearer:

> The day following, I attended on the hill with a trusty friend. Notices had been sent to Oldham, Rochdale, Bury, and some other places, but at the time appointed no one appeared. We waited for hours, until the afternoon waned, but no one came; and then we went down to Royton, to ascertain the disposition of the reformers of that place. Some had been severely wounded, but most of the people were carousing, and there did not appear to be any disposition to retaliate the outrage we had suffered, by force and arms. I called on William Fitton, but he gave no encouragement to such an idea. I went to John Kay, in Royley-lane, but he was as usual, imperturbably placid. He was one of the least impassioned men I ever knew. (I, pp. 216-217)

It is clear from this that Bamford, almost alone, is impassioned enough to consider seriously an armed reaction. The passion and the desperation emerge clearly in his argument to Kay:

> After introducing the cause of my visit I asked his opinion, and in order to obtain it frankly, I spoke the more so. "If the people were ever to rise and smite their enemies, was not that the time? Was every enormity to be endured, and this after all? Were we still to lie down like whipped hounds, whom nothing could arouse to resistance? Were there not times and seasons, and circumstances, under which the common rules of wisdom became folly, prudence became cowardice, and submission became criminal? and was not the present one of those times and seasons?" It was astonishing

> that men could eat and sleep; that "the voice of their brothers blood, crying from the ground," did not make them more miserable." (I, p. 217)

But Kay's counter-arguments eventually convince Bamford. Kay puts forward a series of points: that those guilty of Peterloo are already remorseful; that indiscriminate massacre and assassination are clearly ruled out; that to march against a whole army would be impossible; and finally that any use of violence would be used retrospectively to justify the use of pre-emptive violence at Peterloo (I, pp. 217-218). Bamford shortly after rehearses the same arguments to a meeting of delegates, but the initial emphasis is quite different:

> I told them briefly, that I would not take part in a delegate meeting to discuss the taking up of arms. That I saw not any prospect of succeeding, and if I did, they were not the men with whom I would act. I had sent for men whom I knew, but they came not; strangers came whose faces I had never seen before, and I would not act with such; neither was it to be expected that I should. (I, p. 219)

The double blockage is really one: precisely because of the refusal to work with "strangers", to break beyond the small known community into a different form of relationship appropriate to larger numbers, it was impossible that any direct confrontation with the existing forces of law and order could be successful. Without such a breakthrough, the only options left are submission and defeat or withdrawal into the a-political realm of the domestic. The chapter ends, appropriately:

> Some days after, I was informed of the arrest of Joseph Healey, at Lees. I began to expect something of the sort myself, and told our constable that if he got a warrant, and would let me know, I would go with him any day, or night, to Manchester, and there should be no fuss; no one would be the wiser. He said he would take that course, should he have a warrant; and I attended my business as usual. (I, p. 219)

That a different perspective on the appropriate interpretation of the conflict focussed in Peterloo was already available, is clear from the reaction of another prisoner: James Murrey, captured by the drilling radicals while spying on them. In his official deposition, quoted by Bamford, Murrey relates that (I, p. 194):

> Examinant [Murrey] begged they [the radicals] would not murder him; but the general cry was, "damn him, kill him—murder him."—Examinant said, "you treat ME very differently to what nations treat each others prisoners when THEY are at war. Suppose that I am an enemy, you ought to treat me as a prisoner."

If we remember that the 12,000 troops deployed against the Luddites was a far larger army than Wellington's in the Peninsular campaign of 1808, and recall that Disraeli's *Sybil: or The Two Nations* was to appear only five years after Bamford's *Passages*, we might conclude that Murrey's interpretation was more accurate than Bamford's.

The limits of Bamford's political analysis and position are thus clearly related to his adherence to the experience of a known community; though that basic sense of himself did collapse, of the two options then open—into individualism or into a more organised national radical politics—Bamford basically chose the former.

Can we now attempt to connect these various related features to the actual style and structure of his autobiographical writings, particularly *Passages*? That there is a consonance between the elements so far sketched and the fact of Bamford's writing an autobiography at all should now be fairly clear. Writing, of any kind, is, as a political act, an option for persuasion over any more active strategy; and the choice stems naturally from an analysis that bases itself on the factor of involuntary ignorance. To write about oneself is the natural response if the ignorance in question is taken to be ignorance of your kind of people and of their condition, the absence of that element of personal knowledge so important to Bamford's politics. Moreover, to write an autobiography is simultaneously an act of withdrawal into one's known base and an attempt to extend that known community, to include one's readers in it, to have a 'personal' relationship to unknown people who yet remain strangers. Writing an autobiography was almost the only way in which the tensions in Bamford's position could be both maintained and apparently overcome.

vi : a passive style

But how was he actually to write it? Bamford seems to have intended his readership to include all classes (cf. II, chs. XLVI, XLVII), but if the purpose of the autobiography was, at one level, to persuade, the self-portrait had to attract the sympathy of those readers who might be his political opponents. As we shall see, this involved Bamford in presenting himself passively, as someone almost forced into his

political activity; it meant playing down any element of conscious, willed and deliberate action, of decision-taking.

But the characteristically passive presentation is not simply tactical; it reflects the central features of Bamford's actual life: the experience of living through a process of immense social change, which seemed beyond immediate and adequate human control and which he could at best only minimally influence. Much as he opposed it or personalised it in interpretation, Bamford was nevertheless right to recognise that, in some respects, 'the present distress of the country arises from unavoidable circumstances' (I, p. 148); all the changes of the industrial revolution may have ultimately stemmed from specific human actions and decisions, but the result was—for those living within the process—strictly un-avoid-able. Moreover the high-point, the defining centre, of Bamford's own life was the experience of imprisonment, of being caught up in a judicial process from which he could not escape and which forced him into confined inactivity; arrests, trials and imprisonment occupy the overwhelming majority of pages in his *Passages*. That he should present himself passively is no accident.

To demonstrate that Bamford's passive self-presentation influences even certain characteristics of his style will require detailed analyses. We can approach these by tracing the more explicit elements of passivity. Bamford quotes, in *Passages* II, ch. XIV, a great deal of the prosecuting counsel's speech at the York trial, opening with 'Mr. Scarlett's description of us'. Hunt is regarded as sufficiently well known to require no introduction, but "the others were obscure; they were very little known, and he [Scarlett] should therefore state who they were"; each defendant is then given a line or two of description, including occupation and residence, until the list ends: 'Of Robert Wilde he knew nothing, save that he lived near Ashton-under-Line. Samuel Bamford and Robert Jones were individuals in humble circumstances' (II, pp. 62-3).

Bamford and Jones are given no other description; even among their co-defendants they are the most obscure, the least important. At this high-point of his life, Bamford is scarcely noticed. It is no surprise that the adjective "humble" is the one most frequently used by Bamford of himself. When, later in the trial, a quarrel nearly breaks out between Hunt and himself, as Hunt snubs him, Bamford swallows the insult, commenting: 'I considered the cause too great, too holy—to be prejudiced in the least, by any circumstance affecting one so humble as myself.' (II, p. 89)

His own defence speech ends:

> "Humble as was my situation in society, I would not condescend to beg the boon of mercy from any man or set of men, however exalted their situation. I would disdain to receive that from their pity, to which justice entitled me." (II, p. 154)

Here Bamford is rejecting what elsewhere he will indicate by the term "humiliation", a refusal of the dignity and respect due even to one in "humble" circumstances (cf. II, p. l56f; I, p. 213). But even at the end of his account, in the additional chapters of *Passages*, he will still remark that:

> When "Young England", the other day, met "Young Manchester", in the Free Trade Hall, many rich men, members of Parliament, and exalted characters, gave additional interest to the meeting by their presence. I also was there, and though undistinguished amongst that vast and gay assemblage—too humble indeed to be so—I could not but reflect with satisfaction, that I was one of those who made the mind, which made both Young England and Young Manchester.

"Humble" is always an adjective he is willing to use of his own condition—for example, of the lodgings he preferred (II, p. 47)—but he baulks when the description "humble" seems imposed upon him: then it has different overtones, as when Sir Charles Wolseley invites him to stay, but not in Wolseley's home, only in a nearby inn; on that occasion, Bamford concludes: 'Sir Charles was always kind and affable, without pretensions, but still I could not but feel that in his house, I was, only a very humble guest' (II, p. 27).

It is this sense of disparity between subjective self-definition and external description that underlies some of Bamford's political problems: in his defence speech he objects strongly to the way in which radical meetings were represented in the press —'uniformly styled . . mobs, riotous, tumultuous and disorderly mobs . . ridiculed as illiterate, dirty and mean' (II, p. 79). An awareness of being observed is a constant element: he 'believed ministers had eyes to see, and ears to hear, and tongues to whisper whatever recurred' (I, p. 157). Bamford's reaction is to turn such observation into an asset: in preparing for the Peterloo meeting

> It was deemed expedient that this meeting should be as morally effective as possible, and, that it should exhibit a spectacle such as had never before been witnessed in England . . we determined that . . we should disarm the bitterness of our political opponents by a

> display of cleanliness, sobriety and decorum, such as we never before had exhibited. (I, pp. 176-77)

But such reliance on spectacle, on exhibiting order, could backfire: Bamford quotes a magistrate's comment on Peterloo, 'that "the party with the blue and green banners came upon the field in beautiful order!" adding, I think, that "not until then did he become alarmed".'(I, p. 180) What is felt from within as an expression of responsibility is seen from without as an organised threat, dangerous precisely because organised. The difficulty arises as part of the struggle, already examined, to establish an ordered opposition to an already existing order, a social order composed of the "humble" and the "exalted" and in which, to use Scarlett's revealing phrase, "weavers, and shoemakers, and other artisans, in this kingdom, . . were destined to earn their bread by the labour of their hands" (II, p. 66).

That "destined" marks an assumption of overriding, supra-human, unchangeable order, in the face of which the natural response is to submit. Bamford's political options, for non-violence and relatively small-group activity, often amounted in practice to submission: he offers no resistance to arrest, or (initially) to being chained, counsels against provocation or retaliation, advocates patience and surrender of passions and prejudice, and argues that "unoffending manners" will help "restore the natural balance of society" (I, pp. 81, 104, 199; II, pp. 19, 90).

In these passages he is, of course, accepting and appropriating the role that those he opposed would want to impose upon him: to remain humble and deferential, even to accept the blame for any hostility that may arise. It is no solution then to argue that 'the degradation was with those who offered the insult, and not with those who were compelled to receive it' (II, p. 166).

*

We can link these general features of passivity to elements of Bamford's style by first examining a single chapter, *Passages*, I, ch. XXIX. The chapter opens with eight lines of verse:

> Thou raised'st thy voice, and the people awaking,
> Beheld the foul source of corruption displayed.
> And loyal stupidity, quickly forsaking,
> They found themselves plunder'd, oppressed, and betrayed;
> Then, loud as the storm in its fury out-rushing,
> The shouts of the thousands for freedom arose;

> And liberty only, shall sooth them to hushing,
> And liberty only, shall lull to repose.

And continues:

> Such were the sentiments with which Henry Hunt was received at Manchester, in January, 1819.

Hunt, the narrative goes on, was attacked at a theatre by loyalists. Bamford then appears:

> The same week, a letter was put into my hands at Middleton, from Mr Hunt, requesting me to call upon him . .

Bamford is asked to provide a bodyguard for Hunt's next visit to the theatre and a paragraph describes their arrival:

> About five o'clock on the afternoon of the day appointed,—it was, I think, on the Monday following,—a gang of ten rough-looking country fellows attracted some notice as they passed through several of the streets of Manchester. Their appearance was somewhat remarkable, even for countrymen. Their dress was of the readiest, fit for "donning or doffing", their hats were mostly, beyond damage by warfare, their shirt collars, clean and white, were thrown open,—some wore their breeches unbuttoned at the knees, as the Irish do,—some tramped in heavy clogs, rimmed with iron,—others wore strong shoes, with clinker nails grinning like a rasp of shark's teeth; all bore stout cudgels of greater length or weight;—some carried blackthorn,—some hazel,—and others again had taken a fancy to that portable and effective cudgel; the green English holly. Their bearing was not less striking,—they were all young men, — tall, gaunt, and square-built,—long-legged, free-limbed, and lithe as stag-hounds; and as they went, tramp, tramp, along the flags, people looked, startled, and looked again; whilst the observed ones, noticing nothing, went onwards like men who knew their work, and were both able and willing to perform it. In this manner, they proceeded the whole length of Long Mill-gate, —across the Old Church Yard,—up Hunter's-lane, and Cannon-street, —across High-street, and to the Robin Hood public house, in Church-street.
>
> This party consisted of myself, and nine picked men of my acquaintance, from Middleton. (I, pp. 170-71)

This description is deliberately written from an external, spectator's viewpoint; Bamford is merged into a strange, unknown small group, alien to the streets of the city; but they are his own group, from his own community, and they are an ordered band, marching in step, knowing their business —and armed.

This is the only episode in *Passages* where Bamford presents himself as actually armed and prepared for violence; and he objectifies himself. The episode continues with a 'we'-narrative replacing the spectator viewpoint, and then moves into a dialogue where unnamed voices parry, by inventing unlikely place-names, the inquiries of 'several respectable-looking townsmen' seeking to spy out the addresses of the "gang" (I, p. 172; cp. *Walks,* pp. 268-9, quoted above). The theatre performance is cancelled, and Bamford emerges as the leader to demand the reason why. After an encounter with Nadin, the chief constable, and Hunt's acceptance of the cancellation, the group go to a tavern; Hunt, in another tavern, is attacked by a 'party of "gentlemen",' but Bamford's group is ignorant of this, and Bamford ends the episode with the comment:

> Had they been taken by us in the fact, there would have been a sore and pitiable account of them in the morning. But fate ordained otherwise; they escaped .(I, p.1 75)

On the only occasion when equal armed combat, on however small a scale, seems a possibility, "fate" intervenes. The sentence continues, and the chapter ends (I, pp. 175-6):

> . . and we
> "Whilst the echoes were ringing
> "Went laughing and singing
> "To the merry green woods again."

The final lines of verse have a rather different function from the opening lines: the introductory verses were impersonal, anonymously spoken, quoted as an expression of wide-spread public comment, an aspect of the history that the succeeding paragraph located. Bamford's insertion into this history is passive ("was put into my hands", "requesting me"). The form of the narrative then shifts from the objective mode through a we-narrative, general dialogue and I-narrative to Bamford's own dialogue with Nadin, ending with an indirect-reported speech by Hunt and the comments by Bamford; the closing lines then enact the exit described: the reader, in reciting these lines, is merged into the action, no longer a spectator but one of the

singers.

The chapter is not, it seems, a consciously organised whole, though that suggestion might invite further analysis; but it is fairly clear that the use of varied forms of narration is deliberate. Bamford is aware of the difficulty of relating this episode—for it is, in its implications, an important incident. The devices he uses, briefly noted here, can all be seen as operative in other passages of his work. In describing, for example, the mass-meetings of 1819 Bamford relates that:

> At one of these meetings, . . at which Bagguley,—Drummond,—Fitton,—Haigh,—and others, were the principal speakers; I, in the course of an address, insisted on the right . . of females . . voting [at such meetings]. (I, p. 165)

Though, on his own account, this is a significantly new idea, Bamford still presents others as "the principal speakers", his own contribution being slipped in, "in the course of an address". Immediately after this incident he tells how another idea of his —to introduce music and song at political meetings— was overruled (I, pp. 165-67). Even when Bamford is plainly in the role of a leader he highlights his subordination to other leaders and to his own followers (I, pp. 201-2). When, like Scarlett later, he lists "the leading reformers of Lancashire" he includes his own name last, using exactly the same formula as for the other fifteen or so:

> . . Amos Ogden, of Middleton, silk weaver; Caleb Johnson, of Middleton, cotton weaver;—and Samuel Bamford, of Middleton, silk weaver. (I, p. 9)

This playing down of his own role is apparent in his way of passively inserting himself into almost every activity in which he becomes involved (I, p. 8):

> One of these clubs was established in 1816, at the small town of Middleton, near Manchester; and I, having been instrumental in its formation; a tolerable reader also, and a rather expert writer, was chosen secretary. The club prospered; the number of members increased; the funds raised by contributions of a penny a week, became more than sufficient for all out goings; and taking a bold step, we soon rented a chapel which had been given up by a society of Kilhamite Methodists. This place we threw open for the religious worship of all sects and parties, and there we held our meetings on the evenings of Monday and Saturday in each week.

> The proceedings of our society; its place of meeting—singular as being the first place of worship occupied by reformers, (for so in those days we were termed) together with the services of religion connected with us—drew a considerable share of public attention to our transactions, and obtained for the leaders some notoriety. They, like the young aspirants of the present, and all other days, whose heads are as warm as their hearts, could sing with old John Bunyan —
>
> "Then fancies fly away,
> "We fear not what men say.

The passive "was chosen" seems natural, but add to it the impersonal subjects of some of the following sentences, then the transition to "we", with that final curious distancing of himself, though secretary, from "the leaders" ("They"), and the total effect is, almost, to detach Bamford from any initiative in the whole business.

It is always difficult to grasp the subject of any group-activity, to designate the 'leaders' in a democratic organisation: it is a significant feature of our language that it is awkward to express such relationships grammatically. But Bamford's syntax is not simply an aspect of this. When he describes another meeting, no personal active subject appears until 'after' the delegates have made their decision:

> One of our delegate meetings deserves particular notice. It was held on Sunday, the 16th December 1816; when it was determined to send out missionaries, to other towns and villages, particularly to Yorkshire. Pilkington, Fitton, and Benbow, were, I believe, selected to go forth on this our first mission. The experiment was considered somewhat hazardous . (I, p. 10)

The chosen missionaries appear then as "they" and a traitor is certainly presented as active, but again the impression left by the whole passage is of an unlocatable main subject.

It is, in fact, only the overall impression left upon the reader by Bamford's style, rather than single instances of such writing, that can make the point. Some scattered examples, however, with brief comments, might indicate it.

> On the afternoon of a Sunday, Mitchell went with me to endeavour to find a former play-fellow of mine, who was now a soldier in the Foot Guards. (I, p. 22)

Though Bamford was presumably the instigator, Mitchell is the main subject.

> Soon afterwards I . . returned to Middleton, where events rapidly pressed on my attention.
>
> On the morning of Sunday, the 8th of March, Benbow called on me . . he asked me to join the [Blanketeers'] meeting. . .
>
> On the night of Sunday, the 9th of March *[sic]*, I was requested to attend a meeting in the house of one of my neighbours, where a number of friends wished to hear my opinion . . (I, pp. 29-30)

Again, it is others who take the initiative in involving him.

> It was about this time, though I have not the exact date, that the first out of door meeting was held at Rochdale. Fitton, Knight, myself, and several other public characters were invited to attend; and I did so . . none of the speakers save myself kept their appointment; nothing in the form of resolution or petition had been prepared, and I had to select and arrange these from an old Statesman newspaper which I found at the rendezvous. (I, p. 35)

Bamford is thrust into a prominent position accidentally, only semi-voluntarily.

Other examples of Bamford being invited rather than volunteering to take part in various political activities are frequent, but this displacing of the initiative is also a feature of the way he describes actions not involving himself. *Passages*, I, chapter II begins the story of the book with the following passage:

> It is a matter of history, that whilst the laurels were yet cool on the brows of our victorious soldiers on their second occupation of Paris, the elements of convulsion were at work amongst the masses of our labouring population; and that a series of disturbances commenced with the introduction of the Corn Bill in 1815, and continued, with short intervals, until the close of the year 1816. In London and Westminster riots ensued, and were continued for several days, whilst the bill was discussed; at Bridport, there were riots on account of the high price of bread; at Biddeford there were similar disturbances to prevent the exportation of grain; at Bury, by the unemployed, to destroy machinery; at Ely, not suppressed without bloodshed; at Newcastle-on-Tyne, by colliers and others; at Glasgow, where blood was shed, on account of soup kitchens; at Preston, by

> unemployed weavers; at Nottingham, by Luddites, who destroyed thirty frames; at Merthyr Tydville, on a reduction of wages; at Birmingham, by the unemployed; and December 7th, 1816, at Dundee, where, owing to the high price of meal, upwards of one hundred shops were plundered. At this time the writings of William Cobbett suddenly became of great authority: they were read on nearly every cottage hearth in the manufacturing districts of South Lancashire; in those of Leicester, Derby and Nottingham; also in many of the Scottish manufacturing towns. Their influence was speedily visible; he directed his readers to the true cause of their sufferings—misgovemment; and to its proper corrective— parliamentary reform. Riots soon became scarce, and from that time they have never obtained their ancient vogue with the labourers of this country. (I, pp. 6-7)

In this long account, the only personal subjects of active verbs are the Luddites who, in a subordinate clause, "destroyed thirty frames", and Cobbett, who "directed his readers". All other verb-constructions are passive or impersonal. The continuation of the passage, describing the rise of the non-violent Hampden Clubs, includes more active verbs, but most of these remain subordinate to a causal verb in an impersonal mode. This way of writing history reifies and mystifies.

Active violence is somehow elided whenever Bamford has to discuss it. For example, recounting the end of the Blanketeers' March, he says:

> A body of yeomanry soon afterwards followed these simple minded men, and took possession of the bridge at Stockport. Many then turned back to their homes; a body of them crossed the river below, and entered Cheshire; several received sabre wounds, and one man was shot dead on Lancashire hill. (I, p. 33)

The actual conflict is lost in the silence between the Blanketeers crossing the river and "several receiv[ing] sabre cuts." An even more curious example occurs a few pages later when Bamford complains at the effect of incendiary speakers (who are presented actively); he comments:

> Steadiness of conduct, and consistency of principle, were soon placed, as it were at a distance from us. Our unity of action was relaxed; new speakers sprung like mushrooms about our feet; plans were broached, quite different from any that had been recognised by the Hampden Clubs; and the people, at a loss to distinguish friends from enemies, were soon prepared for the

operation of informers. (I, p. 36)

Actual human attributes are given independence, detached from specific human actions. One wishes, reading such passages, that Bamford would allow his protagonists to claim responsibility for their own reactions.

It is, of course, impossible to 'prove'—except perhaps by a line-by-line analysis of all 520 pages of narrative in *Passages*—that these ways of recounting events are disproportionately frequent; all that the critic can do is point and invite. Nor is one intending to claim, obviously, that Bamford never uses active verbs. What is claimed is that Bamford's choice of passive and impersonal constructions instead of active forms at important moments in his narrative is significantly related to the other features of passivity, particularly political passivity, sketched earlier. If we look at some episodes where active and passive constructions are both used, the point might, indeed, be further reinforced.

> On the day when parliament was opened, a number of the delegates met Hunt at the Golden Cross, Charing Cross; and from thence went with him in procession to the residence of Lord Cochrane, in Palace Yard, where a large petition from Bristol, and most of those from the north of England, were placed in his lordship's hands. There had been some tumult in the morning; the Prince Regent had been insulted on his way to the house, and this part of the town was still in a degree of excitement. We were crowded around, and accompanied by a great multitude, which at intervals rent the air with shouts. Now it was that I beheld Hunt in his element. He unrolled the petition, which was many yards in length, and it was carried on the heads of the crowd, perfectly unharmed. He seemed to know almost every man of them, and his confidence in, and entire mastery over them, made him quite at ease. A louder huzza than common was music to him; and when the questions were asked eagerly, "Who is he?" "What are they about?" and the reply was, "Hunt! Hunt! Huzza!" his gratification was expressed by a stern smile. He might be likened to the genius of commotion, calling forth its elements, and controlling them at will. (I, pp. 19-20)

The simile is appropriate: the crowd throughout has been presented as subordinate, reacting to Hunt rather than moved by any decisions of their own; the characters in this drama are Hunt and the petition; "every [other] man" is merely submerged into a context. Even in the

case of the other delegates, the emphasis is entirely on Hunt ("met Hunt", "went with him"), and Bamford's own specific action is that of a spectator

One would need to be a Karl Kraus fully to trace the political significance of this way of describing political activity, but it is clear that such linguistic habits could only accommodate with difficulty a completely democratic process. Bamford occasionally does present himself as almost energetically active; there is a noticeable decisiveness, of pace and mood, in the following (I, p. 80):

> I blamed them for having any thing to do with private meetings, and advised them, they having committed themselves, to leave home for a time, as I had not a doubt, the police were in possession of their names and would be after them. Elson, I said, might go any where, as he was not much known: Healey I advised to go to his brother at Bolton, and get some money, and keep out of sight entirely, until something further was known. His best way would be to avoid Manchester, and go over Kersal Moor, and Agecroft Bridge; and as I had a relation in that quarter who wished to see me, I would keep him company as far as Agecroft. My advice was adopted; Elson went to prepare for his flight, and Healey commenced doing the same. I was now informed that Lancashire had a pike concealed in his house, and I went thither and got that destroyed. On my return, instead of finding Healey ready, he was busy combing his hair, and adjusting his neckcloth. I urged him to get away if he valued his life; and after some further delay, I saw him fairly on the road, and then went to prepare myself, and in a few minutes I set out after him.

But Bamford's activity here is purely defensive, set in a context of passivity: in the preceding paragraph news of the Ardwick Bridge conspirators' arrest has been brought to him; in the succeeding paragraph he is himself arrested.

A comparable moment occurs when Bamford takes the lead in concocting a cover-story for his co-prisoners—though even on that occasion, having made the appropriate suggestions, he adds: 'I would have retired, but they would not suffer me, and insisted that I should become their [rehearsal] questioner. I complied at length . .'—he presents himself as reluctant even to take part in an attempt to escape being condemned for High Treason! (I, p. 119)

There are in fact very few moments in *Passages* when Bamford is clearly the agent responsible for his own political involvement. The following sentence is perhaps the most decisive of any concerned with

his political choices:

> I determined to go forward in the cause of parliamentary reform. (I, p. 154)

— the strength of "determined" is entirely unusual in Bamford's vocabulary. Yet even that declaration is hedged almost out of existence by the surrounding sentences: the preceding page has been arguing that the absence of wise and experienced leadership excused the excesses of the early radicals (cf. above), and Bamford continues:

> In the absence therefore, of such wholesome monition,—in the ardour also, and levity of youth,—and impelled by a sincere and disinterested wish to deserve the gratitude of my working fellow-countrymen; it is scarcely to be wondered at, that I soon forgot whatever merely prudential reflections my better sense had whispered to me whilst in durance; and that with a strong though discreetly tempered zeal, I determined to go forward in the cause of parliamentary reform.
>
> And so, as it were, like another Crusoe, I lay with my little boat in the still water, waiting for the first breeze to carry me again to the billows.

The final metaphor cancels out the brief moment of actual decision-taking. When Bamford faces his most important political occasion, it is not a metaphor but an actual, unexpected, event that demolishes his resolution. *Passages* I, ch. XXXII shows Bamford close to endorsing the use of defensive cudgels at the Peterloo meeting; arguing that the armed associations of loyalists in Manchester were likely to attack the meeting, Bamford is over-ruled by Hunt, urging that the law will protect the demonstrators; but then:

> . . on the Sunday morning, a circumstance occurred which probably eradicated from the minds of the magistrates and our opponents generally, whatever sentiments of indulgence they might have hitherto, retained towards us. (I, p. 192)

The spy, James Murrey, has been detected and beaten by some of those drilling in preparation for Peterloo. Far from reacting to the consequent loss of "whatever sentiments of indulgence" the loyalists might have held, by urging the even greater need for self-defence, Bamford comments rather:

> I was concerned on hearing this; not only because I disapproved of the violence which had been committed, but because I saw the advantage it would give our enemies against us, should the least irregularity occur in our proceedings on the following day. It was however past, and so far irremediable, and all we could do, was to exhibit the greater coolness and steadiness in whatever situation we might be placed. It was certainly a misfortune; and nothing remained but to make the best of it. (I, p. 193)

The defeatism of "in whatever situation we might be placed" signals, in its passive construction, an abdication of any control over events.

*

We can conclude this analysis of Bamford's characteristically passive forms of describing political action, by noting that, in one sense, 'passivity' was almost the only means of 'control' that a working class radical movement could have exercised at that time over the national situation. When Bamford describes at length the drilling exercises preparatory to Peterloo we can sense some of the difficulties that had to be overcome before a disciplined movement could be forged:

> When dusk came, and we could no longer see to work, we jumped from our looms, and rushed to the sweet cool air of the fields, or the waste lands, or the green lane-sides; we mustered,—we fell into rank, we faced, marched, halted, faced about, counter-marched, halted again, dressed, and wheeled in quick succession, and without confusion. (I, p. 178)

> Next would follow a long drill, in squads; and so expert were the youths, that they would form a line, and march down the face, or up the steep, or along the sides of the Rush-penny; and suddenly halting, would dress in an instant, in a manner which called forth the praises of the old campaigners. Then, when they broke for a little rest, would follow a jumping match, or a race, or a friendly wrestle, or a roll down the hill, amid the laughter of others sitting in the sun. Some would be squatted on the lee of a bush of gorse or tall fern; some reading, some conversing, in earnest discussion on the state of trade, or national affairs, or on their own privations, or those of their neighbours,—for few secrets were kept of those matters,—some would be seen smoking their pipes kindled by burning glasses; and so till the bugle sounded to drill, and after that, away to breakfast. (I, p. 179)

The contrast here between marshalled order and spontaneous relaxation is an index to the general cultural and behavioural shifts and tensions of the industrial revolution as a whole. To oppose the increasingly interlocked and homogeneous nature of an emerging industrialised situation required an increasingly co-ordinated and widespread counter-force. But if a "Spencean" strategy of insurrection was excluded, the only viable action open to such a counter-force was, basically, a withdrawal of labour, solidarity in strike-action, sustained and patient in its very in-action.

On a small scale such tactical passiveness had already appeared as a local weapon in e.g. the Manchester strikes of 1818; at a national level, once an extensive opposition movement had been formed in the early Chartist phase, such tactics were to be proposed as a complete strategy, in the "National Holiday" so much disliked later by Bamford. It was not so much his innate passivity that limited Bamford's political outlook — the circumstances engendered passive response of one kind or another — but his restriction to a small-scale horizon within a known group of political allies that made it impossible for him to connect passivity with any grouping adequately large, and therefore 'impersonal', enough to make passivity more than submission.

Perhaps a final comment on the difficulties both of the problems Bamford faced and of analysing their linguistic expression can be made by examining a single odd sentence. Bamford's departure from Manchester after Peterloo is recounted in the sentence:

> I rejoined my comrades, and forming about a thousand of them into file, we set off to the sound of fife and drum, with our only banner waving, and in that form we re-entered the town of Middleton. (I, p. 213)

That "comrades" is used here (the first instance in *Passages*) of a thousand people is itself notable, but even more inviting of analysis is the unlocated subject of "forming": is it "I", "them[selves]" or "we"; is the implied verb active, passive or reflexive? One might say that here Bamford, instinctively, avoids the inadequacy of attributing the action of "forming" solely to himself as 'leader'; the action can only be that of a collective subject, for which there is no appropriately democratic grammar available. Linguistic analysis cannot convince at this point: other explanations are easily enough to hand —poor education, slip of the pen, hypercritical reading. But the sentence still reads oddly, and perhaps symptomatically—in the sense that Freud's analysis of grammatical slips often indicate a deep-seated tension or problem.

If we move now to an analysis of some of the structural or formal features of *Passages* the difficulties increase—primarily in the area of knowing the criteria upon which to make the judgements that follow. We can first link the characteristics of style examined above to one element of the content of Bamford's autobiographical writings, as a bridge to a more tentative analysis. Bamford's writings are notable among working class political autobiographies for the attention given in them to the subject of women. Where the main emphasis in such writings is political involvement, wife and family, and emotional relations generally, tend to be taken for granted.

In *Early Days*. of course, the emphasis is more natural: he remarks that he 'can scarecely [*sic*] recollect a period of [his] life when the society of females was not very agreeable to [him]' (*ED*, p. 169), and the book certainly supports this. As a child in his father's workhouse, he was captivated by a beautiful Irish girl of seventeen, whom he takes a full page to describe (*ED*, p. 71); his relationship with Mima, whom he eventually married, is traced in detail, including its adolescent embarrassments; at school he 'took quite as much notice of certain pretty figures which sat in the girls room opposite . . as [he] did to those in [his] book' (*ED*, p. 185), and though, 'Mima . . was not forgotten' (*ED*, p. 185), he constantly notes other girls, during work, recreation and travel (*ED*, pp. 189, 197, 199-200, 221, 256, etc). In *Passages* too he includes in the narrative many incidental mentions of girls he sees or meets (e.g. I, pp. 20, 56, 178), and some more lengthy accounts of particular encounters with women (e.g. I, p. 115f; cf. below). His proposal that women should vote at radical meetings is another indication of a special interest (I, p.165).

One could perhaps offer a specific psychological root for this relative emphasis—his loss of his mother at the age of six, the appointment of a new governess in place of his mother, and his father's re-marriage were all formative events (*ED*, pp. 58f, 66, 96); but the appropriate point seems to me different.

Bamford himself recognises, in his 1817 *Account*, that his personal relationships, especially in the case of his illegitimate children, might have political significance at the level of providing ammunition to his opponents, but there is perhaps another level at which they are politically more significant. Considerable work has been done in recent years on the connection between neighbourhood environments and modes of personal relationship; the general conclusion seems to be that relationships in a 'traditional' working class district are characteristically passive, the codes assumed and lived into without

great personal tensions; but this means that the social skills necessary actively to create new personal relationships in a changed environment—a new housing estate, for example—can be learned only with difficulty. If we grasp Bamford's experience of negotiating the move from known community to a world of strangers, as involving similar problems of relationship, then we can see that his emphasis on encounters with women is not fortuitous.

Indeed, his love-life in *Early Days* is actually polarised round two main relationships: that with Mima, following a comparatively easy and 'natural' path, with accepted codes of courting, and that with Catherine, accidentally begun and pursued intermittently through confusions and difficulties, only to end without satisfaction (cf. *ED*, pp. 205-7, 212-15, 221f, 283-87). Mima is almost 'the girl next door', known from childhood; Catherine comes from a different class, a strange world, and Bamford's responses are complex: faced with her mother's economic conditions for a suitor, Bamford says: 'I felt abashed, I thought I was sure enough presumptious *[sic]*, and that I had not any right to stand in the way of the old mother's expectations on behalf of her daughter' (*ED*, p. 207). His reaction to losing Catherine is to attempt to bury all emotion, 'and never more to give to woman the power of inflicting pain' (*ED*, p. 216). In this mood, he has an encounter which clearly underlines the connection between his sense of a known community and his difficulties in reacting in such a way as to deny the patterns and modes of personal relationship engendered within such communities:

> One night as I was proceeding home, a woman of the town took hold of my arm, and desired me to go with her. I had never been so accosted before, and as she walked with me the thoughts of being seen with such an one at my side covered my cheeks with burning shame. Confiding, however, in my own self-control, I took the dangerous resolve of hearing what she had to say, and of observing what she would do. I therefore suffered her to continue her conversation, and she led me into less frequented streets, and by back corners, where under the shroud of darkness her blandishments had well-nigh shaken my virtuous resolves. Something she said about "the sweet air of the country", when I asked her if she came from the country? and on her replying that she did, I questioned her as to where she came from,—and did not my ears tingle, and my heart leap, when she said "from Middleton." "Did I?" what was my name then? I told her, when, uttering an exclamation of joyful surprise, she would have smothered me with caresses. I next questioned her as to her

> name, and seemingly incredulous, she asked me if I really did not know her? I assured her I did not, and she wept to think, as she said, that she should have carried me in her arms when I was an infant, and now that we should meet here I did not know her. Who could she be? I again asked, and she mentioned a name at the hearing of which I almost sank to the earth. She had been born and brought up at the house next door to that of my parents; she was the beloved child of their early friends and associates; she married when I was but an infant, and her husband, when I could run about, used to make whip-cord, and kites, and banding to fly them with for me. I knew the man well at that time, he was still living, and it not unfrequently happened that I was in his company when I went over to Middleton. I was disgusted with myself and her. I shuddered at the sin which I had well-nigh committed, though she would have continued her blandishments, and even pressed me for an assignation at another time. But my soul revolted, and I got rid of her by paying for a glass of hot liquor at "The Dangerous Corner" public house. Dangerous indeed. (*ED*, pp. 218-19)

His refusal here to enter into an impersonal relationship is part of the wider patterns already examined; his relationships with women offer the same kind of difficulties as his political choices, and it is then no surprise to see Bamford, in *Passages*, as it seems to me, recounting the one as a comment on the other. For the writing of his autobiography, as was noticed earlier, presented some of the same problems: to establish a personal relationship with a reader who remains a stranger is difficult, and to grasp the way Bamford tried to solve that difficulty brings us close also to some of the problems involved in writing 'literature', in becoming a novelist.

The following example shows one aspect of the problem. *Passages* II, chapters XIII to XX are concerned with Bamford's trial at York, chapters XXIX and XXX relate the final proceedings at the King's Bench, London. Between these two phases of his trial, Bamford tells the story of his journey down to London (chs. XXI to XXVIII). These intervening chapters may seem at first 'mere' narrative, essentially unrelated to the overall narrative. But if we examine their content more attentively, a different impression emerges.

The second volume of *Passages* is, as has been indicated, very much concerned with Bamford's politically important realisation that personal friendship is an inadequate basis for a radical movement; it might be argued that these chapters help, in fact, to chart his confusion and progress towards disillusion on this matter. Ch. XXI

describes his departure from Middleton, and already a new note appears:

> I should have been miserable if from any circumstance I had incurred a risk of not being in court when called, and had thereby forfeited the bail which my friends had given with me. My radical acquaintances, however, never asked me when, or how, I was going . . (II, p. 104)

That slight contrast, "friends . . acquaintances", is symptomatic, for Bamford is offered no money for his journey by the Middleton radicals — partly, indeed, through his own passive refusal to ask ('I deemed it their place to ask me, not mine them', II, p. 104) —and the sense of being a scapegoat is strongly present:

> I could not but feel that I was about to be victimised on their account. (II, p. 104)

Finally he leaves Middleton with only his wife and little daughter to see him off:

> I could not but reflect that when I went that way on the sixteenth of August, there were ten thousand with me ready to shout, sing, or do whatever I requested. (II, p. 105)

Now the silent departure is interrupted only by one neighbour, who offers a shilling to help, and, from Manchester to Salford, by the company of a "friend, and late co-defendant", Saxton. The chapter closes with Bamford's last long look back at his wife as they part outside Stockport.

Chapter XXII then opens with Bamford soon overtaking 'a young man and his wife', and the three agree to travel together; at Macclesfield, letters of introduction from Saxton to "some honest radicals" brings them a night at an inn paid for by these "kind friends" (II, p. 108). The next day's journey begins to reveal tensions between the husband and wife, John and Margaret: he a slow walker, without much conversation, somewhat selfish, she a good walker, "sensible, well-informed" and clearly her husband's "superior" (II, pp. 109-110). The following day, after a visit to Brandreth's grave at Derby ("that deluded victim" is given "a tribute of heart-felt emotion"), John continues by cart and Bamford and Margaret begin to talk—about 'matters always interesting to females, namely the history of some tender attachments'; she tells how she had rejected an earlier lover,

Robert, who then joined the army and was killed in battle, and for which she sometimes accused herself. When they reach Margaret's home at Lough-borough Bamford is persuaded to stay overnight and join the family reunion. Suddenly, in the middle of the welcome party, in walks Robert, the lover who is supposed to be dead: he greets Margaret's mother as "my other mother" and speaks of the house as one where he left "friends, and mayhap a little of something more than friendship?"

> "Nothing beyond friendship now Robert," said the mother, endeavouring to appear cool.
> "Why, where is Margaret?" he said, "I hope nothing has befallen her?"
> "Margaret is your friend," said the old woman, "but she
> is nothing more now. Yonder sits her husband," pointing to John.
> The soldier trembled, and staggered to a seat.
>
> (II, ch XXIII, pp. 115-116)

Margaret greets him "with all the regard of a sister", but is clearly distressed; Robert's mother enters and is re-united with him; they depart, Margaret retires, the party continues, subdued, and Bamford goes to an inn and 'spent most of the night in confused dreams of the strange scenes which like those of a romance, had passed before [him]' (II, p. 117).

Chapter XXIV deals at some length with Bamford's attempts to get overnight lodgings at various inns, and ends with the advice quoted earlier to foot-travellers not to act or speak humbly (cf. above). Ch. XXV continues the journey, including Bamford's disappointment at calling at a public-house once the home of an old couple who had befriended him years before, only to find a new tenant in the house (II l, p. 121; cf. *ED*, ch. XXIIl). While he rests there, a local constable enters with a young woman in custody for bearing an illegitimate child; Bamford resolves to rescue her! After various complications, the young man who was supposed to have abandoned her actually rescues her and marries her—while Bamford is being charged with aiding in her escape. The chapter ends with a wedding-party and reconciliations (II, pp. 122-129).

Chapter XXVI completes the journey to London: it opens with Bamford being refused breakfast, as a foot traveller, at a public house, and his comments on the difference between such an "aristocratic alehouse" and "humble" inns; it closes with his entering London and being made welcome at the first public house he went into (II, pp. 130-132). But by now his money is nearly spent and ch. XXVII

describes his attempt to sell his poems; unsuccessful, he goes to "the lodgings of my friend Hunt at Mr Giles's" (II, p. 134) but Mr Giles is dead, Hunt has moved, and Mrs Giles does not speak "in that friendly tone [Bamford] had been accustomed to there" (II, p. 134); arriving at Hunt's new lodgings, he is received warmly enough but Hunt makes no offer of a bed and Bamford leaves this "friend and his family" with the thought: "That is not the way . . in which I treat my friends from a distance, when they call upon me in Lancashire," — but partly excuses Hunt:' "it is the way of great folks"—"one of the peculiarities of London," and so forth' (II, p. 135). Returning to Mrs Giles, he finds her "more friendly" and soon has lodgings recommended to him. At the inn he is drawn into a conversation about the jury system, and advocates election of juries by local ballot (II, pp. 136-137). The room given him is filthy but costs him all his remaining money. On leaving the next morning he meets on the stairs "as demure a looking piece of purity as the world ever exhibited"—but the woman turns out to be a prostitute (II, pp. 139-40). Bamford wanders round London, finding no help at various friends' houses; only a beggar, to whom he explains his own penniless situation, offers to help; "pleased that [he] had found one friend in the course of the morning" (II, p. 141), Bamford finally remembers "a gentleman [Mr. Gibb] . . who had behaved very kindly to [him] the last time [he] was in London" (II, p.l4l), and calls on him; he is received very warmly, offered breakfast, and, when Bamford admits to being destitute, persuaded to come every day for his meals with Gibb, and to accept some money. The chapter (XXVIII) ends:

> I thanked him most sincerely. I never was more affected by an act of kindness in my life. He was in truth, "a friend in need, a friend indeed." (II, p. 143)

It is clear that almost without exception the incidents related of this journey are concerned with difficulties, confusions, twists, disappointments, misjudgements in relationships: friends cannot be relied on or are dead, comrades are unreliable, even marriage may be falsely founded, judgements about purity—or about betrayal—may be wrong, hospitality cannot be presumed or trusted; in the world experienced in these chapters no relationship is secure, all are suspect. But love and friendship can still occasionally be vindicated: the journey begins and ends in affirmation. The context is set, however, — and set indirectly—for the coming disillusion with Hunt's friendship and that of other radicals. It is impossible to show that these incidents are selected (or remembered) because of their significance for what

follows; all that one can say, so far, is that, in the structure of the book as a whole, these chapters have more than a narrative value: they prepare the reader for the recognition that is soon to be shared with Bamford. That sequel will be analysed later, but some instances of a similar 'technique' should first be noted.

Perhaps the clearest case of Bamford deliberately prompting the reader's reactions indirectly, by an apparently irrelevant anecdote, is the insertion of Chapters XX to XXII in *Passages* I (pp. 130-143). Bamford is at this stage in prison; he and his fellow prisoners have been examined a number of times by the Privy Council for alleged involvement in the Ardwick Bridge conspiracy; all his colleagues have been sent to other prisons, their fates apparently sealed, but Bamford's is still in the balance: he "was entirely dark as to [his] future destination" (I, p. 128). A new prisoner, George Plant, also threatened with transportation or the scaffold, joins Bamford in his cell. Bamford introduces him to the reader as "a firm believer in ghosts, witches and hobgoblins" (I, p. 130), and then recounts a tale which Plant told him one evening in the cell. It is this story—of Plant's 'attempt to take and carry off "Saint John's Fearn seed" ' (I, p. 131)—which takes up the next eleven pages, narrated with rich detail, vivid dialect dialogue and deliberate artifice.

A whole chapter (XXI) is devoted to locating the setting in a Fielding style of reader-involvement, the actual attempt to take the plant (regarded as a love-charm) is presented ritualistically, even in the typographical lay-out (e.g. I, p. 141), and the suspense of this superstition-ridden expedition in the dead silence of night is carefully built up. The climax comes after the final spell is chanted:

> They looked, and perceived by a glance, that a venerable form, in a loose robe was near them.
>
> Darkness came down like a swoop. The fearn was shaken, the upper dish flew into pieces,—the pewter one melted,—the skull emitted a cry, and eyes glared in its sockets,—light broke, —beautiful children were seen walking in their holiday clothes, —and graceful female forms sung mournful and enchanting airs.
>
> The men stood terrified and fascinated; and Bangle gazing bade "God bless 'em." A crash followed, as if the whole of the timber in the kloof was being splintered and torn up,—strange and horrid forms appeared from the thickets,—the men ran off as if sped on the wind,—they separated and lost each other. Plant ran towards the old house, and there leaping the brook, he cast a glance behind him, and saw terrific shapes, some beastly, some part human, and some hellish, gnashing their teeth, and howling and uttering the

most fearful and mournful tones, as if wishful to follow him, but unable to do so.

In an agony of terror he arrived at home, not knowing how he got there. He was during several days, in a state bordering on unconsciousness; and when he recovered he learned that Chirrup was found on the White Moss, raving mad, and chasing the wild birds. As for poor Bangle, he found his way home over hedge and ditch; running with supernatural and fearful speed,—the skull's eyes glaring at his back, and the nether jaw grinning and jabbering frightful and unintelligible sounds. He had preserved the seed however, and having taken it from the skull, he buried the latter at the cross road from whence he had taken it. He then carried the spell out, and his proud love stood one night at his bed-side in tears. But he had done too much for human nature,—in three months after she followed his corpse, a real mourner, to the grave. (I, pp. 141-2)

Bamford then concludes the chapter with a short paragraph:

> Such was the description my fellow prisoner gave of what occurred in the only trial he ever made with Saint John's fearn seed. He was full of old and quaint narratives, and of superstitious lore, and often would beguile time by recounting them. Poor fellow! a mysterious fate hung over him also. After his return from London, which was in a few days, he seemed to have become disgusted by the levity of his young and handsome, but thoughtless wife. In a short time he suddenly disappeared from the country, and has not been heard of since. (I, pp. 142-3)

Immediately the next chapter (XXIII) opens:

> It was, I think, on the 23rd of April that I was taken to the Home Office with George Plant, for my fourth examination. (I, p. 143)

This sudden switch still leaves the after-image of that jabbering skull and the madness and death of the eleven-page story vividly present to the reader: the ritual examination before Lord Sidmouth that follows is coloured by the sense of terror and suspense conveyed by the ritual of the story; the reader shares Bamford's fear at the prospect of a death-sentence, not through any direct description of what it must have felt like to be awaiting judgement on a high treason charge, but by his participation in the tragedy of Saint John's fearn. It is no accident that the tale contains such phrases as "while there's life, there's hope", "a

silence like that of death", "the toll of a death bell", that the skull plays so prominent a part, that the actual tale ends on the word "grave", or that the final link-paragraph describes the whole incident as a "trial" and concludes by commenting that "a mysterious fate hung over him also" (I, pp. 134, 140, 142).

This substitute or indirect enactment of sensations seems to be employed by Bamford whenever he is faced with a deep experience of emotional reaction. A simple example occurs when he is shut in his cell at Lancaster Castle. He has already described the castle:

> All around were high and frowning barriers of masonry, and we felt as completely shut in from the world, as if we were at the bottom of a great well, where neither force, nor art, nor supplication, were of any avail. (II, p. 4)

This, even with the simile, hardly communicates the sense of absolute impotence, but then:

> We turned in, and my door had not been many minutes closed ere I began to feel as if I were being smothered. My old complaint on the lungs had gone with me to this place, and though I constantly was cheerful, very stubborn fits of coughing had convinced me that I was far from being well. I now began to feel as if I were closed up in a coffin, and not a breath of air above and around me. How dreadful were my sensations! I can never forget them. My chest heaved for air, but the cooling life-giving stream came not, and I stood leaning on my bed, pumping, and gasping, in the close, suffocating den. I thought of the Black Hole of Calcutta, and concluded that the fate of its sufferers would be mine. I thought of getting up to the air-hole, but it was above my reach, and there was not any thing in the place I could have put my feet upon, else I should have deemed it luxury to have stood inhaling the blessed fluid all night. Oh! humanity! humanity! I thought, what is the humanity which builds prisons on such plans as these? I endeavoured to tranquilize my mind for the sustainment of this trial, and I found the effort was not made in vain. (II, pp. 7-8)

It may have, probably did, happen that way; but this detailed description of his "old complaint", barely mentioned before, at this point in the narrative, focuses the general situation, of being hemmed in by possible death, into a specific felt sensation: suffocation is the horrifying level at which the imprisonment is to be experienced. Being "closed up in a coffin" is the possible outcome of the other "trial" he

shortly has to face, and the reader in this passage is made to feel the danger.

Similarly, the description of the execution of George Russel for "stealing a piece of fustian" (I, pp. 89-90), followed by Bamford's comment

> Far be it from my wish, friend reader, to palliate wrong of any degree; but let us hope, and, if necessary entreat, that all waste of life, like this, may have now passed for ever from England. That all useless inflictions may be ameliorated; and that henceforth Justice may be enthroned with Equity and Mercy; for without these she is but a sanguinary executioner (I, p. 90)

might be dismissed as sentimentalising and pious rhetoric—except that they are inserted just before Bamford tells how he himself was driven in custody into the New Bailey to begin his first long process of examination and imprisonment.

A more interesting example of what seems to be an indirect presentation of emotions is in *Passages* I, chs. X to XI. Bamford is here 'on the run' with Healey, both expecting to be arrested after the suspension of Habeas Corpus. An atmosphere of suspicion, suspense and watchfulness has been built up: "Wearied at length with the continued alarms of my intended arrest and commital to prison, I consented to leave home . ." (I, p. 45); ". . a man came in from Bolton, and in conversing said the radicals were in great alarm there, it being reported that king's officers had arrived from London for the purpose of arresting some of the leaders, and that the police were very sharp on the look out for them" (I, p. 60); ". . we learned from their conversation that several persons had been arrested the day before for High Treason at Manchester, and that two of them were named Ogden and Johnson. This was not very encouraging news to us; nor were our feelings tranquillised when soon after a respectable looking, rather elderly man came into the room, and surveying the company round, went away without saying a word. We soon learned that he was the deputy-constable of the town, and this incident hastened our departure" (I, p. 64). Immediately after this, the narrative takes on a different tone: Bamford and Sealey try to find their way in pitch darkness, through unfamiliar country paths, till they encounter and "owd hag" with a lantern; to their inquiry she replies that the roads lead "To many places i' this ward . . an' mayhap some ith'other" (I, p. 65). She agrees to guide them, but suddenly "lanthorn and lanthorn bearer disappeared, and the next [moment] there was a crash and a plash": Healey has fallen into a ditch, and Bamford just saves himself

from following. They extricate themselves, and continue, wondering at the old woman's amazing disappearance, till suddenly they hear "a laugh of almost unearthly tone, which came like a jeering yell upon the wind"; they see "a light, dancing as it were, and moving at a rapid pace through the profound darkness": "The laugh was renewed, but sounded fainter, and almost like a scream of pain; and the next moment the light began to descend, and suddenly disappeared as if sunk into the earth" (I, p. 67). Shaken by these mysterious happenings, they grope on, till they spot a light, "a human habitation which we thought must be a tavern"; the chapter ends: "we opened the door and entered without ceremony" (I, p. 67). By this time, that simple statement has acquired an aura of menace, suspense and even magic: the strange woman seems the harbinger of some deadly witchcraft. Bamford delays the denouement by opening the next chapter with a gradual description of the interior and the people present, with growing hints of hostility and danger, till:

> . . who should make her appearance but the same old woman who about an hour before had vanished so unaccountably. "Excisemen!" "Informers!" she screamed, at the top of a thrilling voice; and at that moment, each man of the company was on his feet; hands were clutching at our throats, and a prospect of certain manglement or murder, stared from those ferocious countenances. (I, p. 69)

The supposed tavern is a "hush-shop" and some queries of Healey's had roused the suspicions of the old woman (cf. I, p. 66), who had suddenly cloaked her lamp and turned away. But Bamford and Healey are recognised and vouched for by a poacher and they are accepted into the company. The violence they escaped is adequately indicated by the detailed and sickening description of a brutal fight that soon develops between the poacher and another client (I, pp. 70-73).

The point of this extended and detailed anecdote, so far, is to make the reader share the atmosphere of suspicion and danger that Healey and Bamford are in, by doubling that situation: they are pursued by the police, but in the eyes of the hush-shop drinkers they are the pursuers, to be treated equally with suspicion; mistrust and hostility multiply, to infect the whole countryside through which they move; the terror of discovery is conveyed more by the reactions of the drinkers than by Bamford's own fears of the police. But now the anecdote begins to operate with a different significance. The fight is vicious and bloody: ". . at times throttling him until his eyes stared as if they were looking into another world . . some heavy kicking now

ensued, until the white bones were seen grinning through the gashes in their legs . . falling with his neck doubled under, he rolled over, and lay without breath or motion, black in the face, and with blood oozing from his ears and nostrils" (I, pp. 71-72). After this nearly fatal fight, Bamford and Healey "soon after left the place . . and arrived at Middleton without further adventure" (I, p. 73). The next paragraph can best be given in full.

> And shall we part here, friend reader? On my threshold shall we part? Nay, come in from the frozen rain, and from the night wind, which is blowing the clouds into sheets, like torn sails before a gale. Now down a step or two. —'Tis better to keep low in the world, than to climb only to fall. It is dark, save when the clouds break into white scud above; and silent, except the snort of the wind, and the rattling of hail, and the eaves of dropping rain. Come in!—A glimmer shows that the place is inhabited; that the nest has not been rifled whilst the old bird was away. Now shalt thou see what a miser a poor man can be in his heart's treasury. A second door opens, and a flash of light shews we are in a weaving room, clean and flagged, and in which are two looms with silken work of green and gold. A young woman, of short stature, fair, round, and fresh as Hebe; with light brown hair escaping in ringlets from the sides of her clean cap, and with a thoughtful and meditative look, sits darning beside a good fire, which sheds warmth upon the clean swept hearth, and gives light throughout the room, or rather cell. A fine little girl, seven years of age, with a sensible and affectionate expression of countenance is reading in a low tone to her mother.
>
> > "And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying. Blessed are the poor in spirit; for their's is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth..." (I, pp. 74-75)

The Beatitudes are quoted, quietly and tellingly, in full. In a new paragraph the room is further described, and then the reunion of Bamford, wife and daughter:

> . . But my wife!
>
> > "She look'd; she redden'd like the rose;
> > Syne, pale as ony lily."
>
> Ah! did they hear the throb of my heart, when they sprung to embrace me? my little love child to my knees, and my wife to my bosom. (I, p. 75)

The reader has been gradually brought within Bamford's home, and finally into his feelings and sensations, even to hearing his heart-throb and feeling his daughter's clasp.

The contrast with the hostility and suspicion of the previous episodes could not be more complete; nor could the contrast between the violence of the hush-shop fight and the atmosphere of peace given in that beautifully placed quotation of the Beatitudes—its inclusion explained in the closing sentences of the chapter:

> They had been at prayers and were reading the Testament before retiring to rest. And now, as they a hundred times caressed me, they found that indeed, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." (I, p. 75)

To acknowledge these contrasts, and to accept the invitation to enter Bamford's home, makes it impossible for the reader to acquiesce in his possible arrest for violently threatening the peace and order of the kingdom! Yet within five pages—having in the meanwhile rejected firmly a plot to assassinate the Cabinet (I, p. 77)—Bamford is in fact arrested (I, p. 81). To read the episodes which precede this arrest as mere accidental narrative, as simply a succession of 'what happened', would be to do less than justice to what is written—and to how it is written. There is an artistry in the pattern of these episodes: the incidents have as much significance as many in deliberately constructed novels. But how consciously Bamford is deploying his effects here is a question which there is no other method for answering than that of literary criticism—and that can only tell us that the effects are achieved.

Other examples of a similar technique might be analysed—for example, Bamford's use of a dialogue with his co-prisoners to emphasise the absurdly exaggerated charge he is faced with (I, pp. 236f)—but various other techniques should also be noted. The contrast between the hush-shop and his own home, for example, recalls an earlier juxtaposition: he describes a typical "public assemblage of working men" in a tavern, somewhat disorderly and confused but mainly courteous and sensible (I, pp. 23-25), and immediately follows this with an account of his first visit to Parliament, where the speaker is "drowned by a howl as wild and remorseless as that from a kennel of hounds at feeding time" (I, p. 27), while amid the clamour "one old gentleman in the side gallery actually coughed himself from a mock cough into a real one, and could not stop until he was almost black in the face" (I, p. 27); the contrast between this "monstrous dream" and the supposedly inferior

parliament of working radicals is sufficiently made by the contiguity. The way in which the Beatitudes are slipped into the narrative is paralleled by the quotation of the Union Hymn "while" the prisoners sing it—which also allows Bamford to comment upon it "whilst my fellow-prisoners are sleeping" (I, pp. 110, 111f). Variations on this last device are frequent: instead of describing a journey, for example, Bamford will recount the tales told on that journey (I, pp. 47f. 95f), while verse passages are often inserted to carry or enact the narrative (I, pp. 4-6, 83, 101, 166, 169, 176, 226, 245; II, p. 165). At times too, he seems to use differences from King's English to make a specific point about character, as in Nadin's constant portrayal as a dialect-speaker (I, p. 227; cf. I, pp. 40f, 83f, 103f, 172f). He is not afraid of breaking into an account to address the reader directly, in familiar 18th century novelistic style:

> Methinks I now observe my elderly reader, first secure his spectacles, and then shaking his head, say, "Ah! he is wide at sea again; with a strong mast, a heavy sail, and not so much as the breadth of a duck's foot for oar or rudder, — What next?—Doth he founder head down, or again break shore?—Let us see." (I, p. 167; cf. I, pp. 36, 78, 164, 276f)

All these aspects of Bamford's writing break through the limits of 'straight' narrative, employing what would normally be regarded as 'literary' devices. At the other extreme from such deliberately stylish writing as the invocation to the reader quoted above, there is Bamford's frequent use of documentary material, from State papers, newspapers or reports of his trials. His own account at times too takes on the stark character of court-room verbatim reporting. It is worth recalling, of course, that the work of Gaskell and Dickens, at about the same time as Bamford's *Passages*, also shows influences from documentary evidence and verbatim reportage. But the point to grasp is that Bamford's writing employs a wide range of 'styles', or perhaps more strictly, modes of *écriture*, intricately tapestried. Almost any passage of any length would reveal, in analysis, constant shifts of kinds of writing—the first three chapters of *Passages*, for example, would repay close attention, in their moves from personal comment through impersonal omniscient history to 'autobiography'. But one long episode in particular awaits examination: the concluding movement of the whole work, where many of the devices so far noted are brought into play.

Passages II, ch. XXXIV describes Bamford's entry into his last prison, Lincoln Castle. The chapters that follow narrate various incidents in prison, leading up to his release. If we attempt to grasp the principle of selection governing the inclusion of these incidents, it is possible to perceive an interesting pattern underlying these chapters. Ch. XXXV hints at this pattern. It opens with Bamford meeting the Rev. Jabez Bunting, who is visiting the Castle; since Bunting had once been a minister in Middleton, during Bamford's youth. The visit prompts "a series of very pleasant recollections of [Bamford's] young days" (II, p. 176). We can sense *Passages* and *Early, Days* receiving their initial impetus here: the prison has become a place for reflection on the course of his life, the reflections the reader is actually reading. This brief mention of his original known community (cf. "I called to mind the names of some of his old friends at that place, who were relatives of mine", II, p. 176) is followed by a curious episode. Lord Sidmouth has received an anonymous threatening letter post-marked Lincoln, and the prisoners are suspected; Bamford introduces this incident with the comment: "We had not been long here before we had reason to expect that we had either some very insidious foe, or some very indiscreet partizan in the neighbourhood" (I, p. 176). This uncertainty about the nature of 'friendly' actions is to colour the narrative from now on. The relations between the three prisoners, Johnson, Healey and Bamford, are beginning to deteriorate by the end of the chapter (cf. esp. I, p. 180), but Bamford closes the chapter by remarking that:

> It is not my intention to enter into a detail of such things. Such a proceeding would embrace too much of what was personal to myself, and not interesting to the public . . It would be foreign to my purpose also, and would disfigure this work, hitherto, I hope, useful and interesting. (II, pp. 180-181)

That Bamford has some idea of both purpose and form for his work is clear from this comment, but on a surface reading the subsequent passages might seem purposeless and formless. They may be; but the following examination suggests that they might not be.

Chapter XXXVI opens by quoting in full a letter to Bamford from Hunt. Bamford offers no direct comment, but the letter, despite its protestations of selfless martyrdom on Hunt's part, is clearly an egocentric and selfish piece of work. That judgement is underlined by its juxtaposition with a formal letter from Robert Bligh, brother of the Earl of Darnley. The latter is written at the prompting of "very

particular friends" of Bamford; it remains impersonal ("Dear sir. . .Yours most faithfully") by contrast to Hunt's ("My dear Bamford . . Your sincere friend and well-wisher"), but Bligh's concern is more clearly focussed on Bamford than Hunt's is. Hunt's letter is revealing in other ways: the postscript contains an attack on Cobbett, an indication of the bitter personal relationships within the radical movement. Hunt mentions too that he is writing his autobiography, a point which recalls Bamford's own recollections in the previous chapter, while the postscript's mention of Bamford's wife foreshadows a later correspondence (cf. below).

The second half of the chapter concerns an investigation into the prisoners' conditions by visiting magistrates, as a result of another letter from a supposed radical friend, alleging cruelty by the governor towards the political prisoners. Again the contrast between the genuine concern of governor, magistrates and clergy (the supposed representatives of repression) and the spurious concern of radicals is implicit. During the magistrates' visit, Bamford unintentionally puts Healey into a "humiliating" position—being discovered washing his own shirt! Healey is furious, and a further deterioration in their friendship is obvious. The chapter ends with a suddenly introduced anecdote: the governor's peacock and hen alertly spot a hawk, and protect their chick, well before any human eyes spot the danger (II, pp. 187-188). The point of this incident seems to reflect back on the other incidents in the chapter: as yet the implications of these separate factors—Hunt's letter, the lying letter from radical friends, Healey's hurt pride and anger—are barely visible; in the following chapters they are, like the hawk, to come more and more into focus.

The next chapter indicates further shifts in Bamford's network of friendships: Major Cartwright's sincere attempts to help are unnecessary, since "the magistrates evinced every disposition to be kind" (II, p. 188); visitors to Johnson and Healey "never changed a word" with Bamford, while his "best and firmest friend" proves to be a "good old woman", "like a mother" to him, who is the wife of a local clergyman and has no contact with radicalism (II, p. 189). Healey begins to exhibit "duplicity and false pretension" and an argument develops in which Bamford accuses him of "being perfidious under the guise of friendship" and "liken[s] him to the viper which stung the bosom of its benefactor" (II, p. 190) — a fight follows. The chapter ends with an extension of this atmosphere of suspicion and fading friendship: Bamford is slandered at Middleton as being a spy and the charges "were but too coldly combatted by those who called themselves [his] friends, but who alas! knew too little of that 'generous friendship', which, 'No cold medium knows; / Burns with one love,

with one resentment glows'." (II, pp. 191-2) A committee disproves some of the charges, but the slanders continue (II, p. 192).

Chapter XXXVIII introduces two new factors: Bamford's chest-complaint returns, and his "night-cough, as at Lancaster, only much worse, attended by profuse perspirations and other weakening symptoms"—but it is noticeable that no agonising description is presented on this occasion; secondly, Bamford's wife Mima arrives to look after him. The authorities are again considerate, arranging a double room for them, a "welcome domicile" within the prison (II, p. 194). Mrs. Bamford's actual arrival is spoilt by Johnson and his wife intercepting her and, "in a tone of friendship" but with utter lack of feeling, inviting her to take coffee with them even before she and Bamford have met (II, p. 195). The total insensitivity of the Johnsons' behaviour baffles and hurts the Bamfords and the chapter ends with a foretaste of their later retreat into domesticity, a mutual unburdening of "whatever lay heaviest, and most painful" in their minds—and "of such matters", Bamford concludes, "what with the falsehood or apathy of friends, and the open or insidious detraction of enemies. God knows we had enough." (II, p. 196)

The sense of a gathering criticism of radicals is briefly counterbalanced in the first paragraph of ch. XXXIX, which praises "a small but firm band of co-patriots at Oldham"; Bamford records his gratitude to them, but emphasises their uniqueness: "Their like never, to my recollection, existed previously in Lancashire, nor has it ever since" and the paragraph ends with the comment that many are dead and all will soon be (II, p. 196). The mood of this section is re-asserted with the remark that his wife's presence gave him "always one true friend to converse with" (II, p. 196) — the circle of trust has effectively narrowed to his own family, which however remains incomplete: his little daughter is still in Middleton. His wife becomes "one who with me could retrace the hours and days from childhood, and leading me to bright recollections, could wile me from present ill, to past happiness, until the present also, at times became tinged with brightness"—autobiographical memories become the only source of happiness, as every other context proves false. The few lines of verse he uses in connection with his wife convey this sense of isolation:

> Afar it faintly shone!
> As might some star alone,
> Which rode amid the storm, when all the rest were gone.

The rest of the chapter is taken up with a long anecdote. Bamford tells how "some forty or fifty years back" a pedlar was robbed and

murdered at a lonely farm-house; the murderers were never found and "the property, of which there was supposed to be rather a heavy amount, was never recovered" (II, p. 197); the farm-owner, however, rapidly became prosperous soon after the murder. Later the farmer died, and his widow "was now a most antique-looking personage, short, dumpy, and active for her years, and wearing a gown and bonnet, which all the women agreed, could not have been made during the last half century —it was intimated, in fact, that they were new soon after the catastrophe of the poor pedlar" (II, p. 198). Finally, the shepherd of the farm—"the oldest, and most confidential servant"—plots with some casual labourers from Manchester and from the pedlar's own village to rob the woman. The robbery is carried out, with some violence, but the shepherd and the two villagers are eventually arrested. Bamford's reason for telling this story is that he now goes on to describe the shepherd's execution, which he witnessed. The description is detailed and rather horrifying. The account, and the chapter, ends with "one of the young genteel ruffians of the country, a sir Harry Goodricke", ascending the vacated gallows and, "as a specimen of gentlemanly taste", stand "looking on the people outside, and steadying himself by laying hold of the halters still pendant from the gallows" (II, p. 20l).

The story certainly appealed to Bamford because, as he says, the execution "was the first of the sort [he] had ever witnessed" (II, p. 197). But in its context the story seems to be more significant than that. We cannot forget that execution was Bamford's possible fate for his political activities (cf. "The governor motioned me to go up with them, but I respectfully declined"—II, p. 200) and that recollection affects the level at which we read the tale. F it could certainly be read as an allegory or parable: it was part of the radical case that the "ruffians of the country" were really, "some . . years back", the "genteel", that their present prosperity, however respectable, originated in forgotten violence, robbery and murder, that they, if anyone, ought to be the ones put upon the gallows, even if the actual culprits were long since dead. But Bamford himself was prepared to accept that violence bred only violence: the chain of murder answered by robbery would, and should, end in the horrible violence of legal execution, however much one "regretted the imperfection of our human means for the protection of right, and the punishment of wrong" (II, p. 200).

It is typical of Bamford that he uses the phrase "good and faithful servant" in connection with the Oldham radicals (II, p. 196), then emphasises that the shepherd in the anecdote was "the oldest and most confidential servant on the farm" (II, p. 199). Yet though a

political interpretation seems hinted at, the story remains only possibly allegorical, hovering on the edge of an oblique comment on radicalism.

The critic's stance becomes even more uncertain as Bamford continues, in chapter XL, the account of his health. His illness becomes worse "and the means [he] took to restore it, were just the opposite of what [the] case required"; he comments: "I had begun to have some apprehensions that this disorder would be rather troublesome to get rid of—it might bring me very low—possibly it might conquer me at last—but this latter contingency I viewed as very uncertain, and at all events too distant to call for immediate seriousness; and thus, like all careless young fellows I continued to neglect" (II, p. 202). Eventually, however, "Accident . . did that for [him] which a course of medicine would perhaps have failed in accomplishing" (II, p. 204); he finds a "warming plaster" among some medicine sent by friends, wears it for too long and thereby contracts erysipelas, which "would cure [his] cough, and restore [his] health, if it took a good turn, and if not, it would kill [him] very suddenly" (II, p. 205). He is in fact cured and the doctor concludes that "had not the erysipelas attacked [him] . . [he] should have inevitably been consumptive" (II, p. 206).

Obviously, a man in ill-health in prison will pay considerable attention to any illness, but it is worth noting that this is the second time in two chapters that Bamford has indicated the possibility of his death; his illness has already been used as an oblique comment on his imprisonment (cf. above); now it perhaps—the suggestion is tentative—has a wider resonance: without the apparently drastic experience of imprisonment, it is possible that Bamford would have faced political execution; his accidental and indirect cure has distinct parallels with the general pattern of his political trajectory at this moment, just as his attitude to his illness exactly describes his early political attitudes.

The illness is, at any rate, certainly not narrated purely for its own interest: it provides the occasion for a curious incident, when Healey sends information to the Middleton doctor providing Bamford's medicine, that Bamford is not really ill at all (II, pp. 206-208). This is not only a factor in Bamford's final break with Healey; it also directly parallels the earlier accusation that Bamford is not really radical at all, that he is merely shamming politically. Moreover it is in this chapter, between two passages concerned with his illness, that Bamford first introduces the event that is finally to disillusion him with political radicalism: Hunt writes "like a friend" to offer Bamford enough money to keep Mrs. Bamford with him; on this occasion the money does not appear, but this offer is shortly to play an important role (II,

pp. 203-204; cf. below). That the chapter is, in all its aspects, a crucial one is clear from the conclusion, where "boroughmongers" and "reformers" are judged equally destructive and, with Mrs. Bamford again absent, God alone remains as a "mighty friend":

> I was disgusted.—I was sick and beyond the power of reasoning with the villainy which I met with at every step—I could not enter into such ungenerous warfare, nor lower myself to the rascally weapons used against me. The still, unobtrusive voice of truth, was not heard, and I was too often condemned. This was one of the most painful passages of my life. Envy, and its sure attendant—detraction, haunted me within the prison and without—I never think of that time without horror—the boroughmongers had incarcerated my body, but the reformers wounded my soul. How I preserved a manly bearing, none can know save HE who sustained me—and that I have lived to forgive,—to wipe from my heart the foul drops which these things generated there,—I have to bless the same Creator, whose wisdom and beneficence is extended beyond the perishable animosities of perishable men.
>
> To God my thanks ascend,
> Who doth my steps attend;
> For he hath ever been to me,
> A mighty friend.
> His wing hath been my shield,
> His hand hath been my stay,
> As, through a dark and stormy world
> I sought my way.
>
> (II, pp. 208-209)

Chapter XLI is, it seems to me, the final breaking point. The equation of boroughmongers and reformers is underlined in the opening paragraph: Hunt "actually . . instituted an order of knighthood; the order of 'Saint Henry of Ilchester'. The first knight was himself, Saxton having dubbed him, and the second knight was the said Saxton, Hunt having dubbed him in return" (II, pp. 209-210). The radicals reproduce all the corruption, vanity and foolishness of the order they profess to oppose. Hunt is seen as "deranged" and Bamford "had now, and for ever after, done with his judgement" (II, p. 210). Only the genuine knight, Sir Charles Wolseley, shows "not a friendship of words only", but the money he offers is deflected by Bamford to the imprisoned radical, John Knight—whom Bamford however immediately attacks: ". . as I have found, old John, would

have seen me boiling the stones of the castle for dinner, sooner than he would have done me, or any one else, a like turn" (II, p. 210). Bamford continues: "As for my friend Hunt, no sooner had my wife become settled the second time at Lincoln, than his motive for helping her there became apparent" (II, p. 210). That "friend" is deeply ironic by now. For Hunt only wanted the precedent of Mrs Bamford staying with Bamford in order to demand that his own mistress join him. Since Bamford has pledged himself to secrecy about his privilege, he refuses to acknowledge the fact publicly for Hunt. He adds: "I could not but be sensible—though Hunt's self-love,—which he was constantly disclaiming—blinded him to it—of the difference between a man being indulged with the company of his own wife, and being indulged with the company of another man's wife" (II, pp. 211-212). On this issue they finally break. Hunt's last letter is still signed "I am dear Bamford your sincere friend" but Bamford only "wrote a cool letter of acknowledgement" and they "never corresponded afterward" (II, p. 213) The Chapter concludes:

> I had seen through the veil with which devotion had covered my eyes. I would not be any longer a passive instrument of his will, and so, as I no longer suited his purpose, he had done with me, and I gained the loss of his friendship. (II, p. 213)

The phrasing of those last words is exact. Throughout this long section the dominant theme has been the loss of political friendships. As we saw earlier, Bamford's political allegiances were based on personal relationships; an earlier section, analysed above, showed him meeting various kinds of breakdown and confusion in personal relations; now the climax has come: radical political "friendships" cover only the same kinds of egotism, corruption and self-seeking as other, apparently opposed, forms of politics. To see through that "veil", finally, is for Bamford, a tremendous "gain": he ceases, in his own eyes, being "a passive instrument"—a precise description of his mode of political activity (cf. iv, vi, above). From now on the only personal relationship on which to build a life is that of married love — even Hunt's false (in Bamford's view) relationship with his mistress is rejected. But pure domesticity is a-political. This realisation is a kind of conversion for Bamford.

Typically, his way of emphasising the importance of this illumination is to tell an apparently irrelevant anecdote. Chapter XLII opens with an account of "a very affecting incident" (II, p. 213). A young man who had narrowly escaped being hanged is about to be transported for life; his mother arrives to see him for the last time, but as he comes

out of his cell to meet her she is overcome with emotion and faints; by the time she has recovered consciousness he has gone for ever (II, pp. 213-214). Bamford concludes the incident without comment—but its relevance to his own situation is clear: emotional reaction can cause a blindness which defeats the very object it aims at (compare "The veil with which devotion had covered my eyes" quoted above).

From then on, Bamford's priorities and allegiances are clear. He relates in detail the facts concerning Mrs Johnson's death and the refusal to allow Johnson to attend her funeral, in order to justify the authorities' action. He recounts his final release from prison, emphasising his own expressions of gratitude for the governor's and magistrates' kindness, by contrast with Healey's and Johnson's truculence, and vindicating his attitude by arguing that his conduct would "disarm . . some animosities"—his old 'change of heart' approach (II, pp. 218-19). Chapter XLIII begins his journey home with his wife—and tells how a landlady at an inn initially suspected that they were not really married: a recall of his difference with Hunt, but also, in Bamford's relaxed reaction, an indication of how easily he can now accommodate himself to a 'stranger's' responses. The idyllic mood of this journey home is conveyed in the lyrical descriptions of the English countryside (II, pp. 220, 222, 223, 224)—in which the fact that so much of the land belongs to the aristocracy can now be passed over without comment (II, p. 223). The high-point of the journey comes when an overnight stay in Sheffield is cut short by the discovery in their bed of "one of those noisome flat insects, so common in the beds of towns and crowded places", which persuades them immediately to "get out 'into the green lanes'", and to "breathe the sweet country air" (II, p. 223). They leave Sheffield and climb over the moors till

> In the valley we had left—now as we could discover of a beautifully undulating surface, and gaily green in the sun,—lay the town of Sheffield, shrouded in its furnace clouds. On our right were the wild and boundless districts I have mentioned, and before us was the wrinkled front of Mam Tor, frowning like an eld, in witch-land. (II, p. 224)

The preference for country, against "towns and crowded places", emerges strongly here. But there is something more being prepared: the mysterious resonance of that last phrase, "like an eld, in witch-land"—echoing but also contrasting, in its associations, the description of Sheffield as "great city of Vulcan", with "all the shining jewels of this wondrous cave—shrouded in smoke, and sulphur, and glaring red

fire" (II, p. 223) —is taken up in a passage which needs to be quoted at length:

> We walked to the height of Hattersage-Grange, and there stopped to survey the vast, solitary, yet pleasing scenes. My wife was seated on a grassy knoll, whilst I stood beside her with my stick and bundle over my shoulder—my back towards the sun, whose beams were somewhat mitigated by light clouds—and my looks directed over the wold towards the Yorkshire border.
> "Well, I am convinced now," I said, breaking a long silence, "that Burke was not so far wide of the truth after all."
> "What did Burke say," she asked, "for my part I never heard him say much of either truth or falsehood."
> She thought I was alluding to one of the simplest of my radical comrades, whom we had nick-named "Burke."
> "Pho! it's Edmund Burke, the great orator and apostate that I mean."
> And what did he say?" she asked.
> "Say? He called the people, "the swinish multitude," and I am convinced he was right; for I have discovered I am one of them."
> "What do you mean?" she again asked, now more interested.
> "I can see the wind," I said, "and that's a sure sign I'm one of the swinish herd."
> "See the wind? and what's it like?"—asked she, looking up, and laughing.
> "It's the most beautiful thing I ever saw," I said, "and if thou'll come here, thou shalt see it also."
> I will suppose that the curiosity natural to her sex was excited, for she was instantly at my side.
> Now look over the top of the brown heath with a steady eye, and see if thou canst discern a remarkably bright substance, brighter than glass or pearly water—deeply clear, and lucid—swimming, not like a stream, but like a quick spirit, up and down, and forward, as if hurrying to be gone.
> "Nonsense!" she said, —"there is not anything."
> "Look again, steady, for a moment," I said, "I still behold it."
> "There is," she said,—"there is—I see it—Oh! what a beautiful thing."
> I gave her a kiss and said I loved her better than ever. She was the first woman who, I believed, had ever seen the vital element, the life-fraught wind.
> "Is that the wind?" she asked.
> "That is the wind of heaven," I said, "sweeping over the earth, and

now visible. It is the great element of vitality,—water quickened by fire.—the spirit of life!"
I know not whether I was quite right in my philosophy, but we bowed our hearts, and adored the Creator; and in that, we were both right, I hope.

We stood gazing in wonder and admiration; for still, like a spirit-stream, it kept hurrying past—or as a messenger in haste; and so we left it, glittering and sweeping away. —This was on the morning of the nineteenth day of May, 1821.

And reader, I dare be bound with thee, that if, having a good pair of eyes, thou wilt at the same season of the year, and on a day like ours,—with a mild sun, and a quick breeze out of Yorkshire,—if thou at such a season, and on such day, climb to the top of Hathersage-Grange, and stand with thy back to the sun.
—Mam Tor visible on thy left hand,—then also, shalt thou see the beautiful apparition—the spirit of life—which we saw. It will repay thy trouble well, I assure thee.—Neither I nor mine can ever forget it, whilst memory is ours. (II, pp. 224-227)

The passage recalls, in its function if not its quality, such passages as Wordsworth's vision of the moon on Snowdon in Book XIII of *The Prelude* (1805) or the final pages of Lawrence's *The Rainbow*. For Bamford is clearly trying to convey here an immense experience, and its function is just as clearly to leave a sense of completeness, satisfaction and peace in the reader, to bring him to share a kind of conversion-experience which is a symbolic substitute for the actual, political, conversion in question. There is a return to the known community (the mistake over "Burke" exactly parallels the mistakes in the passage from *Walks* quoted above), and there is an acknowledgement that somehow—in a way the connection with seeing the wind does not clarify (it is that kind of symbol)—Burke was right, that such people as Bamford are "the swinish multitude" and ought to keep their place. Bamford's place is now 'home', with his family, and the final chapter of narrative brings him home, the final paragraph completing the reunion of the family, the final words emphasising the new priority:

Our walk to Manchester the next morning was a mere pleasure trip. We scarcely stopped there, but hastening onwards, we entered Middleton in the afternoon, and were met in the street by our dear child, who came running, wild with delight, to our arms.

> We soon made ourselves comfortable in our own humble dwelling; the fire was lighted, the hearth was clean swept, friends came to welcome us, and we were once more at home.
> "Be it ever so humble, There's no place like home."
>
> (II, pp. 229-230)

ix : conclusion

There the narrative part of *Passages* ends. The final two chapters explain how the work came to be written and outline political aims for 'THE NATION' (which has, however, "only a step-mother's claim to [his] services"—II, p. 235), an appeal aimed, amorphously, at "the wise and good of all classes" and suggesting no more practical political structures than "a brotherhood" (II, pp. 238, 239). Chapter XLVI shows that Bamford was aware of the difficulties of persuading people to read of his experiences (II, pp. 232-233), and that *Passages* is a work "of novel execution" (II, p. 232).

The point of the analyses above has been to show that *Passages* does have an unusual form, that it verges on, without ever quite clearly becoming, a work our responses to which are controlled and guided by literary techniques more often to be expected in novels and imaginative literature generally than in apparently simple narrative. Bamford, it should now be clear, is not simply writing a report of his experiences; by selection, by thematic patterning, by indirect or near-allegorical commentary and illustration, by parallels and juxtapositions, he is trying to overcome the barrier between his experience and that of readers who would not have shared that kind of experience but who might, by their response to his anecdotes and apparently irrelevant inclusions, find an echo, a resonance. It is perhaps impossible to judge how consciously shaped his writing is; but the same might be said of other writers to whose work we would not hesitate to apply some of the interpretative techniques of criticism employed above. Perhaps, as Bamford remarks in an appropriate context, "reality is always romantic, though the romantic is not always real" (II, p. 230).

Certainly passages such as the fainting mother episode recall, say, Mersault's discovery of a newspaper cutting, in Camus's *L'Etranger* (Part II, ch 2), which tells a 'true' and tragic story, later the basis of Camus's *Le Malentendu*: at what point does such a story become 'literature'—in the possibly genuine newspaper-story found by Camus himself, in its inclusion in *L'Etranger*, in its elaboration in *Le Malentendu*? More generally, if we consider, say, Orwell's *Road to Wigan Pier*, Clancy Sigal's *Weekend in Dinlock* and Greenwood's *Love on the Dole*, how (and why) do we distinguish the genres? Bamford

recognised that he was writing a work which approached 'literature': commenting on the encouragement he received from the serialisation of "Pickwick, Nicholas Nickelby, Jack Sheppard" he remarks:

> Without presuming to affect an approach to the practised writers of the day, I had often thought that my romantic life, if well written, would read as well, at least, as some of the magazine articles which occasionally fell in my way—as some of the trashy, unreal novels which the press sometimes deign to extol.

It is worth recalling, of course, that Bamford was a poet and—whatever the quality of his poems—was aware of the difficulty of finding an adequate form: though he will use poetry where he can as a contribution to the narrative, he recognised that Peterloo "never presented itself as it were, to [him] in the form of poetry; it was too overpowering, too brimful of application, to be measured in verse; [he] made several attempts that way, but it would not do, and [he] never sought to describe it in any other form until this present publication [*Passages*]."

It would be interesting to show, in fact, how the famous account of Peterloo in *Passages* is influenced by some of the factors already analysed—the emphasis on crowds and the encounter with strangers, the elements of passivity, the switch from involved to observer standpoint, the significant highlighting of certain episodes—but that task can be left, with profit, to the reader. One could also analyse the gradual movement in Bamford's prose writings towards a mode closer to literature—from the relatively 'straight' *Account* of 1817 through the experimentation and exercises of *Passages* and *Walks* to the more novelistic style of *Early Days* and perhaps the attempt in the 1851 *The Lord of the Manor and the Lord of the Mill*; a simple pointer would be, for example, the absence of the Saint John's fearn episode in the 1817 *Account*.

However, the main point to be emphasised here is that *Passages* is a half-way house. The writing —the style and structure— is a fusion of historical documentary, personal narrative and imaginative literature — if such category-terms can be allowed to stand. Bamford does not transmute his experience fully into fiction, into a novel, where the relationship to his material would have required a different kind of skill or capacity: an imaginative creation of, and inwardness to, 'other' characters, a breaking beyond the bounds of his own actual experiences, a distancing from self. To some extent, perhaps, his meagre education provided some of the limits in that direction. But it also seems to me that there is a complex relation between his political

position (reflecting, as we saw, his social experience, and reflected in turn in some aspects of his style) and the mode of his autobiography. Just as the limits on his political stance were concerned with the difficult transformation of a close, known personal community of relationships into extended and 'impersonal' forms of relation to unknown co-operators, to 'strangers' —a transformation Bamford eventually refused in his virtual retreat into domesticity— so the limits of his self-expression are deeply connected with his inability to enter fully into a mediated relationship with his experience and his audience.

One can perhaps put the point more clearly another way: to read a novel is to enter another community, to penetrate others' experiences, to leave the horizon of one's own 'world'; in the process, one's horizon is opened, one's community re-defined, one's experience reflected back and refracted, prepared for judgement. To write a novel seems to require the same kinds of openness; to read an autobiography also does. But to write an autobiography does not demand openness in the same way: the horizon remains the closed circle of one's self, even if concentric circles of self-identification, chronologically traceable, appear within it.

The terms used above to describe the process of reading a novel have a clear correlation with a possible description of the political mode necessary for a fully democratic participation in a social world. I tried earlier to indicate the positive reasons why to write an autobiography was a decision homologous with Bamford's limited political position; but to seek an elucidation of the limitations of his actually writing an autobiography is perhaps to arrive at a threshold of currently answerable literary questions—and political horizons.

*

Chapter 2 : Alexander Somerville
'One of my faither's Simerels'.

i) Names and anonymity

ii) 1832 and alienation

iii) A structure of identifications

iv) The Anti-Corn Law League

v) Aspects of the historical context

vi) Dombey and Son

vii) *Roger Mowbray*

viii) Conclusion

Unless otherwise specified, page references are to *Autobiography of a Working Man, by "One Who Has Whistled at the Plough",* 1848. *Dombey & Son* is quoted from the Hazell, Watson & Viney '*Daily Mail* edition'. See the Primary Bibliography for details of other texts..

If at Peterloo banners demanding 'parliamentary reform' mingled with others advocating 'repeal of the Corn Laws', the two movements represented by those slogans soon diverged. In the 1840s Chartists and Corn-law repealers were distinct and often antagonistic groups. Bamford may have only dabbled in corn law repeal agitation, but Somerville was closely involved, employed for a period by the Anti-Corn Law League itself. He also touched, at important moments, the insurrectionary elements in working-class agitation of the 1830s and 1840s, but his relation to them was hostile. His political position was clear, a commitment to the kinds of organised pressure-group activity exemplified by the ACLL.

This chapter cannot present an exhaustive analysis of Somerville. I want simply to focus on one element in his autobiography, as revealing an underlying homology between his connection with the CALL, and through that with certain features of English society in the mid-century, and the structure and content of his *Autobiography of a Working Man* (1848). That element is the importance, in various ways, of names. The analysis is not strictly of 'style', but parallel perhaps to the analysis of the role of women in Bamford's autobiography (cf. above, chapter 1, sec.vii).

The title-page of the autobiography includes no name: *The Autobiography of A Working Man. by "One who has whistled at the plough".* The opening pages (ostensibly addressed to "My dear boy" — the author's son) give no family surname, recounting his ancestors simply in terms of "your grandfather and grandmother, my parents" even though the second paragraph is largely occupied with a comment about names (pp. 1-2):

> One of them, Lawrence, died at Perth within my recollection. I was to have been called Lawrence after him, but a change was made, and I was named after my mother's brother, a collier, living at Square, near Berwick-upon-Tweed - a worthy man, to whose name I may not have done all the honour I might have done. In my boyhood I used to regret that I had not been called Lawrence. I then thought my own name was a shabby one. Perhaps my dislike to it arose from its being so very common in Scotland.

Common or not, the reader is not told the name: we are given the name of the author's father's horse ("the common equine name of Dick"- p. 2) but not his father's. An uncle's Christian name and the full name (John Orkney) of Somerville's maternal grandfather are given,

but neither of Somerville's parents are named. Somerville's siblings are named, but not himself:

> My brother James was born in the Cove; Peter was born a year or two after, in Thorntonloch; Janet was born next, in Wood Hall; Hary next, in Thornton Mains...; and, lastly, I was born at Springfield.(p. 5)

A sister's married name is given casually ("The eldest, Margaret, now no more, mother of those five excellent young men, the Doughtys", p. 8) and these pages of family memories are studded with Christian names of brothers and sisters — but the author's own name and those of his parents remain absent. It is, in fact, impossible to discover the author's full name from the auto-biography until its climax is reached. On page 277 a. sentence of court-martial is quoted:

> The Court, having found the prisoner 'guilty' of the crime laid to his charge ... sentence him, the prisoner, Alexander Somerville, to receive two hundred lashes ...

This long silence, though odd, might be explained by the convention of Somerville writing his autobiography as letters to his son; but that convention only rarely intrudes and within a few chapters effectively ceases to operate. Moreover, the preface acknowledges that in its published form the work is actually addressed to the public at large (p. iv). Before an alternative explanation is suggested, the role of names in the autobiography has to be analysed.

Other names are omitted from the autobiography, their place taken by initials and/or dashes. Some of these omissions are connected with a girl he refers to as "the nameless ONE" (e.g. p. 263), whom he courted unsuccessfully and therefore whose name and those of her relatives he conceals (pp. 124f, 129); others concern political incidents (cf. pp. 347, 348, 354, 394, 412), or personal friends (e.g. pp. 37, 149, 177f, 186f). All these omissions might be covered by the explanation Somerville himself offers:

> In consequence of this Autobiography not having been written to be published in my life-time, nor so soon as the year 1848, had I died before, I find in it several names of persons which for the present must be omitted. (p. 230)

Sometimes, however, it is the inclusion of a name that is interesting: he gives the names and characters of the family cows (pp. 46-48), of a

farm-horse (p. 62), and of his plough-horses (p. 96). In his youth, Somerville lived in a world of known people and things — even more so than Bamford — so familiar and personal to him that on running away from home he says an individual good-bye to the corn-chest, the pump, the wheelbarrow, the parritch-cart, Kidley the cow (p. 75f), and finally "remembered a large beech-tree ... on which ... all of our family who had herded cows in those woods had carved the initials of their names, with the dates and other memoranda. He paid a visit to that tree, and once more put [his] name on it, and then turned away" (p. 77). When the three brothers return home together, years later, Somerville again notes the "trees on which all three, with years between, had carved [their] names" (p. 368). His early world is one in which people are distinguished not by their surnames but by a fusion of name and character: six casual workers named Michael are differentiated as "old Michael, young Michael, big Michael, wee Michael, singing Michael, and Michael the laird" (p. 71); we finally learn his father's Christian name only because "old Bonar, the orry horse" is so like "old James, the orry man" (p. 62).

Somerville remembers launching a local nick-name: "In my effort to call the old woman Mary Edgly, I called her Essel, which name everybody else took up; she lived ten or twelve years after that time, and was always called Essel" (p. 14). Mary Edgly's husband, Thomas Brown, (as Somerville notes, "it is the custom for married women, in Scotland, to retain their maiden names, a custom which sounds strangely in English ears", p. 41), used to tell Somerville fairy tales, and, "as Thomas Brown had known the fairies personally, [Somerville] had as complete a belief in their existence as [he] had that of the people who lived at Stobby Castle, or at Edinburgh, or anywhere else beyond Thriepland Hill and Branxton", about whom other people had told him (p. 16). The very naming of people and places creates their reality, if they exist outside the child's immediate experience.

As a boy Somerville shared in another old man's world, a world created by names: blind James Dawson, "a man of strong imagination" who "had read history and geography extensively", "used to sit down and call to Sir Walter Raleigh, Essex, Burleigh, and other courtiers of Elizabeth to come to him, and when they came he sent them to fetch her majesty. He would then go into political arguments with them about Philip of Spain and the other personages and subjects of Elizabeth's reign. He would listen as if some one spoke into his ear, for their observations, and would interrupt them at times impatiently, if they did not seem to be holding a sound argument. Intermingled with such converse he would speak aside to some shepherd or farmer whom he had known in his younger days, and ask him what he

thought of Burleigh's opinions. The next minute he would address me by name, and ask a question as to what I thought of Queen Elizabeth's dress."(p. 39)

It is in this setting that the author is first given any name: "I, in the usual way, asked, "Well, James, how are ye thi' day?" he said, "Man, Sandy, I'm glad I've met ye .. you must go this minute to the Empress, and tell her that Frank Horne must not be made a slave" (pp. 39-40). Since the "Empress" is the imagined Empress of Russia, whereas Frank Horne is actually a "lad from Branxton" we cannot be fully assured of the status of "Sandy" until the name is later repeated — the only name given Somerville till the court-martial.

Old James Dawson's imaginary world is not far removed from Somerville's own, in which "old Bonar", the horse, can be regarded as having, not just his own language, but a degree of religious and supernatural insight (p. 62f), and in which the repetition of the names of threatening things can magically ward off danger: "I'm not feared for thunder, nor the man of the moon, nor wull cats neither" (p. 60).

So far we are in a world similar to Bamford's known community, where a name naturally referred only to someone within that community, and which was also permeated with superstitious beliefs. But Somerville is aware, in writing, that others – even his son – do not share that world, and he is prepared to describe it in some detail: its work-processes, its dialect, and its peculiar names for places and things (cf. e.g. pp. 9-10, 44f, 48f, 55, 74, 97-104, 140-141, 366). It is not his origins in a community of familiar names, places, etc., that concerns us here, however, but his continued interest in names outside that community. When he leaves home he passes his mother's home-village and seeks out his grandfather's grave and that of "two brothers and a sister" who had died before Somerville was born; he tries to conjure up "what kind of a man he had been" and what the dead children might have become (p. 79). Later, that scene is echoed, in a different graveyard: Somerville and a brother, James, "were like younger sons of Old Mortality, scraping the moss from obliterated letters, to read the names of men and women long dead, of whom we could know nothing. But once in possession of these unknown names, we moralised on the probable characters of those who had once answered to them in days that now belonged to the dark past" (pp. 118). In Edinburgh his "greatest entertainment of an intellectual nature" was attending debates of the Synod of the United Secession Church, "not so much from the interest attached to any single topic under discussion" but because "many of the debaters were ministers of whom [he] had heard; whose reputations for piety and ministerial ability stood high, and whose very names were always uttered by [his]

father .. with .. veneration; and whom [he] could now look upon" (pp. 109-110).

Somerville's introduction to politics is, of course, through the names of politicians: when the Grey government is announced in a newspaper, Somerville and his work-mates "read over the list of the new ministry. Some of the names were unknown to us, and some familiar names that we thought should have been there were not there, the name of Hume especially" (p. 143). Names are for Somerville an almost effective substitute for the real person: of a friend he says, "I hardly ever write his name, or look upon it when it is written, or speak it, or listen to it when it is spoken, but the echo of that friendly counsel, and the form and image of that disastrous time, come back upon me" (p. 184), while in the case of "the nameless ONE", "To me there was a charm about every one who bore that name" and he even starts drinking heavily to have "the daily satisfaction of associating with one or more of her nearest relatives, and with two or three other relatives bearing the same name" (p. 135).

Some of the instances where names play a role in the autobiography indicate underlying social reasons for this constant interest. For example, Somerville relates an amusing anecdote on the disparity between apparent social importance and actual social role (interestingly, the case of a newspaper editor given priority in Canning's office), revealed only in an exchange of "cards" – the unknown name suddenly given importance by the attached professional description (p. 112); on one occasion, he obtains a paper signed with Cobbett's name as an introduction to London contacts (p. 341); both these episodes illustrate, of course, the (continuing) role of the visiting-card in 19th century society.

One of Somerville's early jobs was the commonplace task of trying to collect the names of subscribers for a newspaper (p. 182). Two other incidents show how, in a period of social and geographic mobility, a name could often be the only element of continuity in relationships: in 1847, as a newspaper correspondent, he meets some of the officers he knew fifteen years before in the army, and, by not introducing himself, accompanies them unrecognised (p. 226); after the same time lapse, even the offer, eventually, to introduce himself is enough to jog the memory of a publican who had entertained him without knowing "the stranger" (pp. 342-3). But these are very minor examples of a (now) familiar experience. Somerville's concern with names has deeper roots, and we can now begin to trace them.

His account of his first experience of class-conflict - directly in the form of schoolboy imitation of a battle between soldiers and "ragged radicals" in 1819 (pp. 21, 24f) - includes the interesting comment:

> Some one ran to the schoolmaster and told that I was thrashing "Master" Somebody, for he being a gentleman's son was called "Master", while I had to submit to a. nickname, derived from the state of my clothes. (p. 27)

His punishment on this occasion includes being demoted from the top of the class-list: the "teacher kept slates with every pupil's name written on them", on which conduct and academic marks were totalled every Friday; Somerville alone had scored no bad marks that week and "watched with tremulous expectation the reading of the names" - but despite his excellence is deliberately placed bottom (pp. 30-31). In the army too, name-lists can be manipulated to victimise:

> The dinners are then cut out, each man's allowance laid upon a plate. One turns his back towards the table, and another touches a plate with a knife, and calls, "Who shall have this?" He whose back is to the table names some one; and so on they proceed until all the plates are touched, and all the men in that room named. If Johnny Raw is to be once more vexed or victimised, a bone without meat, or almost without it, is laid upon a plate. He whose back is turned has been secretly told that this plate will be touched, we shall say, the sixth in turn. Accordingly, when the man who touches the plates with his knife says, for the sixth time, "Who shall have this?" the reply is, "Johnny," or "Cruity", or whatever they call him. (p. 223)

The victimisation is clear; so too is the overall context of military standardisation, the reduction of every new soldier (allotted his generic nickname) to an equal facelessness, differentiated only by name and number (cf. also pp. 202-4, 215, 218f). The experience is, of course, traditional, but it is worth emphasising that this was precisely the situation in which Somerville achieved national notice as a named individual (cf. ii below).

As a soldier in Spain in 1835-37, Somerville encountered this aspect of army life at its most de-humanising: he "made out the returns of sick and dead men at Vittoria, every day, where, during the first winter, we lost nearly four thousand men" (p. 432), "kept our own company's accounts ... and knew what every man's credit was when he died" (p. 436), and even "made it [his] business to ascertain all the casualties by sickness or wounds in action" in order to publish them (p.436). His comment that such deaths left "blanks in the company's roll, in which some of the bravest and best were scored out, with the words written,

'killed in action, 5th Hay', or '6th June'," (p. 438), underlines the extent to which his experience of warfare presented individual men to him as mere names on a list.

In fact, Somerville fought against this reduction: "knowing more about the dead men, of every regiment, than any other individual, and the time at which most of them lost their lives ... [he] was applied to by their friends, on returning to Britain, to give information about their fate, and the debts due to them by the Spanish government" (p. 436). This knowledge, and the publication of his *Narrative of the British Legion in Spain* (1837), brought him "daily ... twenties, forties, and sometimes one hundred letters" (p. 451) from relatives seeking advice about the recovery of pay and compensation; but in taking up these cases, Somerville entered a Kafka-esque legal world in which names, signatures, lists, identifications and his own signed guarantees became so much paper for financial speculation, legal quibbling, and government bureaucracy, and in which the original bearers of the names involved were soon a secondary consideration (pp. 450-66 : Appendix III). As a youth Somerville had already, traumatically, encountered the purely legal significance of a name - he had been fined for "coming into town with a cart which had no ticket of the owner's name and residence on it", even though the town officer "knew [his] master very well, and .. the cart, though it had no name on it, was his cart" (p. 65).

That early incident is already perhaps an indication of the kind of changes overtaking the known relationships of a small community, but in the affair of the Spanish certificates, where names of strangers became all-important in a network embracing the legal, communications and security systems of the country, we begin to grasp on a major scale the shape and model of a new kind of society.

ii : 1832 and alienation

Somerville's central insertion into that new kind of society began, not inappropriately, with the sending of an anonymous letter to a newspaper. In May 1832, during the feverish nine days of uncertainty about the eventual reaction of the House of Lords to the Reform Bill, Somerville, then a soldier in the Scots Greys, stationed in Birmingham, was one of a group of soldiers who decided "that the best means of preventing a collision with the reform movement and the national will, as expressed by the House of Commons, was to give circulation to the fact that [the troops] were not to be relied upon to put down public meetings, or prevent the people of Birmingham from journeying to

London, to present their petitions, and support the House of Commons by their presence" (p. 245).

This group "caused letters to be written and sent to various parties in Birmingham and London, to that effect. Some were addressed to the Duke of Wellington, some to the War Office to Lord Hill, and some were dropped in the streets. Those letters were necessarily anonymous" (p. 246). Somerville also, however, wrote a letter to a London newspaper affirming this position. Its publication, on May 27th, led to his court-martial (ostensibly on a charge of disobedience in a riding-school incident) and flogging; a Court of Inquiry into the legality of the court martial aroused national interest. *The Times* sensationally, even replaced some columns of its normal front-page advertisements with an account of its findings.

The narrative of these events is clear enough. It is their impact on Somerville that concerns us. From the time of his flogging, Somerville became a local, then national celebrity, but not as a known individual person, simply as a name to be used as a slogan. Again and again, Somerville recounts experiences of this divorce between himself and his name.

After release from hospital after the flogging, Somerville is in a pub writing another letter to the press to publicise the court martial, when the drinkers inquire about "that soldier that was flogged a week ago"; Somerville declines to offer information, and is then upbraided for cowardice by comparison with the writer of the letter of May 27th (pp. 301-3030. In this incident, there are three Somervilles: himself in the pub, the flogged soldier, and the brave letter-writer – none identified with the others. Once his second letter is published, the public can name him "Somerville", but Somerville himself remains unknown:

> Nobody in the crowds knew me; but many of them inquired eagerly for Somerville. "What are they doing to him?" "Why don't they allow him to come out?" They thought the gates were closed to keep him in . . none of them knew that they were talking to him" (p. 304).

While being escorted to Coventry and again on the return to Birmingham, Somerville meets the same unwitting queries about "Somerville" (pp. 305, 309). He even has beer thrown over him in a pub for refusing to drink to "Somerville" – an act of intolerant imposition that contradicts the toaster's profession of admiration for independent opinion (pp. 307-8). While waiting to appear at his Court of Inquiry he is enrolled, as an unknown "soldier standing in the way", to polish the boots of the judges (pp. 325-6). During a celebration

procession for the Reform Act, Somerville is on sentry duty outside the barracks:

> Not one of the many thousands knew me personally, but each band ceased to play as it came near the barrack gate; each trade or section of a political union, halted in front of the gate, as pre-arranged by a master of ceremonies, and three cheers, loud and long, were given for "Somerville for ever!" They had not the remotest suspicion that I was the sentry, with my carbine on my arm, standing in the gateway looking at them. "For ever!" they shouted in connection with my name. (p. 340)

That name soon became a profitable commercial commodity: "full, true, and particular accounts" of his case are hawked around, none of them authorised by him, and mostly "inventions of some enterprising printer, or flying stationer" (p. 303). Madame Tussaud's offer him £50 to exhibit "Somerville the soldier" (p. 346); a theatre-benefit is proposed; he is offered payment "to lend [his] name to be used in a newspaper" (p. 346); collections, both genuine and fraudulent, are made for him and in his name (pp. 345, 347f); he is urged to "invest the money [collected for him] and the use of [his] name, in a public-house" (p. 372); he finally agrees to use his name to help launch a literary journal, but even then he is left in debt for "the expenses ... incurred in [his] name" (p. 373).

Somerville's name also became a political weapon: at first, "People took it into their heads to pass resolutions at public meetings, and to send these formally written out" (p. 306); later, he himself is required to attend political meetings or, on being recognised at a meeting, is urged to speak: "I was observed; some one called me loudly by name; there was shouting and clapping of hands, and a cry for me to go to the platform" (pp. 349-350; cf. pp. 344, 354). But all these "impositions committed on the public in [his] name" (p. 348) only provoke Somerville's repugnance: he has no wish to be a celebrity and feels that his motives are misunderstood and misrepresented; he experiences a total divorce between his private existence and his public image, between Somerville and "Somerville":

> There was not, in all the metropolitan wilderness of streets and houses, and it is a wilderness to those who are alone, a more lonely being than I was, at that time. I saw my name every week on the bills of newspapers, saw and heard people reading those bills at street corners; heard my case and myself discussed in the parlours of public-houses, occasionally by persons who professed

> to know me intimately; none of which persons I had before seen in all my life. I felt that I was not the kind of man that everybody expected or believed me to be. They depicted to themselves a person of flashy exterior, fluent in address, able and ready to talk and speak anywhere, at any time; and so well-skilled in the ways and usages of free and easy society, as to take a hand at cards, play billiards or bagatelle, or crack jokes, crack nuts, or crack heads with equal readiness. I knew of no quality which entitled me to respect, except that I had a strong right arm [and] a determination not easily turned aside. (p. 350)

In a strict sense of the term, Somerville's name had become alienated from himself. The direct parallel to his experience of his name in its new status is his relation to the money collected for him:

> There was a moral space, a chasm between me and that money, which made it different from any other money; I had not worked for it. I never loved it as my own. I never had confidence in it .. My brothers warned me that I was losing it; but they did not see it with my eyes, nor feel it to be an alien treasure, as I felt it. (pp. 372-3)

The parallel suggests the near-contemporary analysis of Marx: names, like money, were increasingly becoming an abstract, an emptied yet powerful medium of relationship; the older forms in which "Singing Michael" was an adequate designation were being replaced, in Somerville's experience at least, by a world in which names were units on a list or rallying-cries divorced from the actual, living persons who bore them. This was, of course, an ambivalent social change: on the one hand, it enabled Somerville to become available, through letters from total strangers, to many people he could help, as in the Spanish certificates episode; but it also, for example, allowed Somerville to be imposed upon by a correspondent writing under his personal name, while concealing his real interest as a journalist (p. 306f).

In the area of political organisation the ambiguity is acute. Chapter XXIX recounts Somerville's involvement in an insurrectionary plot in 1834. On the strength of his reputation as "Somerville the soldier", he is invited to attend a secret meeting, where, he says,

> I was hurried to a private room, but not before some persons had come forward to shake me by the hand as a brother unionist, and to introduce others whom I did not know. Some of these last were foreigners, who spoke English with difficulty. But they

> seemed to be quite familiar with my name, and with the affairs, military and political, in which I had been engaged, and shook me by the hand warmly; one of them advanced to embrace me as a brother democrat. (p. 402)

The revolutionaries are willing to work with a man known only, or mainly, by name; Somerville's response recalls Bamford's: "I expressed unwillingness to be engaged in any enterprise of that kind, with persons whom I did not know" (p. 404). Eventually he notifies the authorities and newspapers, by letter, about the plot – without revealing the names of those involved. The trust the plotters placed in a man known by name and reputation is betrayed.

iii : a structure of identifications

We can move from this analysis of the role of names, and Somerville's own alienated name particularly, to an examination of the structure of the autobiography as a whole, by focussing on one particular episode.

Among the many letters Somerville received as a result of the publicity about his case (cf. p. 306), was one from his brother Peter' (pp. 323-4), with whom he had lost contact many years before. They miss each other in London, but hope to meet at home in Scotland. At Glasgow, on his way home, Somerville is met by another brother, James, who says "that a gentleman who travelled with him from Edinburgh, had a very strong desire to see" Somerville.

> I at once put on my hat, and went with him. We entered an apartment at the inn, where sat a personage with a weather-beaten face, whiskered, respectably dressed - something like the mate or master of a ship that has been on a long voyage. We bade each other good morning, and made several observations about weather, politics, country news, and so forth, and still it did not occur to me that this bearded, weather-beaten, naval-like personage was more than a fellow-traveller with James from Edinburgh.
>
> James, at last, said to me, "I suppose you do not know who this is?" I looked at the stranger, and said, "No." "Did you never know," James continued, "any one in the east country of the name of Peter Simerel?" "Peter Simerel," I replied, "there were no Simerels but ourselves in the east country, that I know of; I do not remember of a Peter, but," - I was going to say - "our Peter." I did not get it out. It was our Peter. When he found me trying to recollect him, and could not, the tears rolled out of his eyes, over

his weather-worn face, and he cried "*Sandy !* don't you know me?" I, like him, hardly able to make myself intelligible, cried "Pate, I did not know you." After a time, we all three fell into a fit of laughter, and laughed at ourselves, because we, who had not met since some of us were children, had met now as if we were still children. (pp. 362-3)

But not quite as children. We can compare this incident with one in 1829, also involving the identification of Peter, when Somerville was eighteen:

> One wet day I was in Tammy Grant's, and found Mr.Weatherston sitting beside the half-mutchkin stoup. Somebody named me as I entered, pronouncing my name as it is usually done in that part of Scotland, Simerel. "What Simerel are ye?" said Weatherston. "One of my faither's Simerels," I replied. "Onybody could tell you that," said he:"but what are ye , what do ye do?" (p. 314)

In this earlier incident Somerville still inhabits a known world, where, say, "Mooney's Jack" would be an adequate way of referring to a local child. By the time of the second incident Somerville has moved decisively into a different world, where even his own family-name is, at first, insufficient to guarantee that its bearer is indeed a relative.

That recognition-scene is, it seems to me, almost a micro-model for the structure of the autobiography as a whole.

Whether the structure is deliberately intended is debatable; there is some evidence, in the revised editions in 1854 and 1860, that it was, but that there is some kind of incomplete pattern seems, on analysis, fairly clear. In chapter VII Somerville writes: ". . there are other moving causes to this act of publication; but this is not the page on which to write the confession of them" (p. 91). Appendix III, reprinted from the *Manchester Examiner* of Nov. 20th 1847, finally clarifies this:

> Here, then, is the cause of publishing my Autobiography. as hinted in the seventh chapter. The time for confessing why I had consented to publish it, had not then come. My hope was, to raise as much money by the first volume, as would enable me to introduce an account of the Spanish expedition, and my concerns with the Spanish government and the certificates; and end by saying, "I have paid all; I am free, and shall now work for myself and my family." I hope to live to say this; though, from the reproduction in print of the scandalous case at the Mansion

> House, I have been led to explain these personal affairs sooner than I would have otherwise done. (pp. 464-5)

Somerville had been extensively maligned for allegedly speculating in the Spanish certificates, by obtaining the payments due to war-casualties by buying up their claims. His autobiography was a prelude to clearing his name. But we have already noted that his name does not appear in the autobiography until the crisis-point of his court-martial.

The effect of this silence is to delay identification by the reader of the unknown but (in intention) sympathetically portrayed individual of the earlier passages with the once well-known political figure of the 1832 period; once that identification or recognition has been made, and it has then been insisted that in 1834, 1839 and 1848 Somerville "saved" the country from revolutionary plots, a further identification could be made: of that Somerville with the Somerville unfairly accused in the case of the Spanish certificates. At the point where his narrative moves to a self-justification of his dealings in the certificates Somerville prints a letter which begins:

> Sir - And is it really possible, that you are the same Sergeant Somerville who was pay-sergeant of the Grenedier company of the 8th Scots, when we lay in 'Auld Bartholomew Convent', just out of Saint Sebastian? Oh, sir, if it was not for the one thing more than another, I would come this very minute to see you. If you be the person that I mean, you must be a tall, full-faced man, stout made. (p. 449)

The autobiography was, it seems to me, constructed to provoke the same kind of reaction by the reader.

But the bones of that underlying structure are only visible beneath a considerable muddle. Somerville first says that the autobiography was intended to be published only after his death (Preface, and p. 230); another note tells how he sent "this portion of the Autobiography", sealed, to friends in January 1847, then, from fear of possible death, added chapter XXX (p. 419); Appendix I then opens:

> It is now necessary to state, that the Autobiography up to this point, including the note appended to the last chapter, was published in weekly fragments in the *Manchester Examiner*; the last chapter having appeared in that paper on Tuesday, the 15th February, 1848. It was intended that the note appended to that chapter, should form the end of this volume; and that, if the

> public evinced any desire, or sign of a desire, to have a second volume of the Autobiography;- a second, containing an account of my two years of military service in the civil wars in Spain, and other matters occurring since, would be published. (p. 421)

But the 1848 revolution in France, and the possibility of its being imitated in England, intervened (cf. pp. 421f), and Somerville added to the published autobiography the appendices (I, IV) on "The Political Revolutions of 1848" and "The 'British Revolution'", while between these he included (from the *Manchester Examiner* of 13th and 20th November, 1848) two "extra chapters of the Autobiography" (p. 428), containing material presumably intended for the 'second volume': Appendix II, "Military Experiences in Spain", and Appendix III, "The Spanish Certificates".

Clearly, the 1848 edition was opportunist and incomplete. But both those adjectives require qualification. Somerville, as a working-class autobiographer, did need some appropriate opportunity to offer to the public at large a work which originally, he maintains, was written as a series of letters of advice to his son; the crisis of 1848 prompted him to produce a modified version "to warn working men of the perils into which they are led by leaders whom they cannot control" (Preface, p. iii). But the effect of publishing his "continuous narrative" (p. iv) up to 1834, with appendices covering 1839 and 1848, was not simply to make the narrative incomplete: it neatly avoided the period in Somerville's life, during the mid-1840s, when he was secretly employed by the Anti-Corn Law League; by omitting that period entirely, he avoids the possibility of his reader making yet another, and perhaps unwelcome, identification.

Somerville does identify himself (on the title-page) as the "One Who Has Whistled at the Plough", one of the pseudonyms under which he wrote disguised ACLL propaganda, but the fact that he was an ACLL employee is never revealed. In his *Conservative Science of Nations* (1860, p. 265), interestingly sub-titled *The First Complete Account of Somerville's Diligent Life*, Somerville quotes a letter from an 'M.P.' in 1843 which plainly shows that at that time even the identification of Somerville as the "Whistler" was to 'be avoided:

> I am frequently asked in the House of Commons who the writer, calling himself 'One who has Whistled at the Plough', is. Of course I preserve your incognito.

Norman McCord puts this matter in its context:

> The Leaguers, on Cobden's recommendation, engaged a writer especially suited to this work - Alexander Somerville, the "'Whistler at the Plough", as his articles were signed, and "Reuben" as he appears in the correspondence of the League leaders. Somerville's connection with the League was kept secret - hence the use of the code-name Reuben for him in the correspondence, and in his writings he posed as a disinterested observer of the rural scene. In this capacity he did a good deal of useful work for the League, writing under several different names which, as Cobden said, would "lessen the expense to us, & answer the purpose of advocating the cause more extensively." Another reason for the secrecy about Somerville may have been his personal defects - he occasionally without warning went off for days on a drunken spree.

iv : The Anti-Corn Law League

Clearly, the interest shown in names in the autobiography itself is part of a wider problem for Somerville which is partly reflected in the structure, incomplete and muddled, of the whole work. But the importance for Somerville of names and of fusing different public and private identities is a reflection of something wider still.

One could, for example, compare the latent structure of the autobiography with a very familiar device in Victorian novels: the early appearance of a 'stranger' who is eventually identified, in the denouement, as the mysterious wealthy patron or long-lost relative, parent or heir. Or one could note Thackeray's use of various pseudonyms to avoid being identified by the public as the single author of such widely different works, published in periodicals of varying prestige. It is, however, the significance of Somerville's connection with the ACLL that I now want to develop.

That the League was a new political phenomenon has often been emphasised. The *Quarterly Review* even regarded it as an unconstitutional conspiracy, though some of its tactics were fairly traditional. What worried contemporaries and has fascinated later historians was, however, the League's superb efficiency and organisation. It was this that gave them the edge over their opposition. What has not, however, been sufficiently stressed is that the strength of the League came from its existence, tactically and organisationally, in a world of names. Its early reliance on travelling propaganda lecturers was a failure. Only when the League concentrated its energies in a new direction did it become a significant pressure group. The

germ of this shift is seen in an announcement in the ACLL Circular for 24th September, 1840:

> The Council of the National Anti-Corn Law League wait only for the completion of the year's registries [of electors] at the hands of the revising barristers, to carry into operation the plan which has long occupied their attention - of appealing directly and personally to the constituencies of the kingdom.

Three years later the germ had grown. In a speech in October 1843 Cobden proclaimed: "we propose to provide a copy of every registration list for every borough and county in the United Kingdom. We intend to bring these registers to a central office in London." That was the base. From their central office, the League planned to correspond once a week with 300,000 of the 800,000 electors in the country. Somerville's own account of the League's offices in Manchester makes the essential points:

> We . . see a counter somewhere between forty and fifty feet in length, behind which several men and women are busily employed, some registering letters in books, some keeping accounts, some folding and addressing newspapers, others going out with messages and parcels. This is the general office, and the number of persons here employed is, at the present time, ten. …
>
> During the day [the Council] room is occupied by those who keep the accounts of cards issued and returned to and from all parts of the kingdom. A professional accountant is retained for this department, and a committee of members of council give him directions and inspect his books. These books are said to be very ingeniously arranged, so as to shew at a glance the value of the cards sent out, their value being represented by certain alphabetical letters and numbers, the names and residences of the parties, to whom sent, the amounts of deficiencies of those returned, and so on.
>
> Passing from this room we come to another, from which all the correspondence is issued. From this office letters to the amount of several thousands a day go forth to al! parts of the kingdom. While here, I saw letters addressed to all the foreign ambassadors, and all the mayors and provosts of corporate towns of the United Kingdom, inviting them to the great banquet which is to be given in the last week of this month. The amount of postage for letters going out during the week ending 7th January was £18-2-6; but the amount of postage was frequently as much as this in one day -

for a single day it had been so high as £38. In this office copies of all the parliamentary registers of the kingdom are kept, so that any elector's name and residence is at once found, and, if necessary, such elector is communicated with by letter or parcel of tracts, irrespective of the committees in his own district. . .

In another large room on this floor is the packing department. Here several men. are at work making up bales of tracts, each weighing upwards of a hundred weight, and despatching them to all parts of the kingdom for distribution among the electors. From sixty to seventy of these bales are sent off in a week, that is, from three to three and a-half tons of arguments against the corn-laws^ The publications sent are twelve in number, a copy of each being put up in one cover for each elector and tenant farmer in the kingdom.

Somerville also describes the League Council at work, mainly in dealing with correspondence, and quotes the rules for tract-distribution on the basis of local lists of names. We can add to these aspects the later tactics of the League in persuading its supporters to register as voters and in having opponents struck off the register, often by dubious methods: quibbling over the exact description of an elector in the register, having one elector challenge as many as 2,000 names on the local register, swamping the Post Office with last-minute objections to forestall appeals. The League also urged supporters (in a "private and confidential" letter) to "qualify" for voting by buying the necessary land, often bought *en bloc* and parcelled out under separate names.

The financial structure of the League was based on a single bank account, on which all cheques were drawn, and the money itself, according to Somerville's description, was collected at meetings

by blank cards and pencils being handed round the assembly. As the cards were returned with the name of a subscriber and the amount which he intended to give when called upon at his own house, Mr. Moore read the name and amount, commented on the individual and his profession...

The League also used, as the Chartists spectacularly did, the tactic of petitions – already, of course, a traditional mode of pressure-group activity – and objected strongly when its opponents allegedly used coercion to swell counter-petitions.

All these facets of the League's organisation and activity rested on the deliberate exploitation of an increasingly available way of grasping,

and manipulating, the society as a whole: precisely as a network of names and addresses. Older modes of political relationship and pressure - patronage, local 'influence', kinship alliances, family connections - were being partly superseded by a form of national association of mutual strangers, organised as names on lists, petitions, subscriptions, registers, mailing accounts. It was a transitional phase, perhaps: the 1832 Reform Act had enfranchised only an extra 217,000 electors; with the later reform Acts the electorate became too large to be "appealed to .. directly and personally" - psephology based on numerical statistics replaced petitions of individual names, mass newspapers took over from mass correspondence as the dominant national means of political communication and influence. Our own period is familiar with national registers of names and addresses -we all use telephone directories - but in the 1840s they constituted the ground for an important shift in political consciousness and organisation, and perhaps also in the definition of democracy and of party-political priorities.

v : aspects of the historical context

The political exploitation of names and addresses by the Anti Corn Law League can be placed in a wider context of social and administrative changes in the 1830s and 1840s. The Registration Act of 1836, requiring the systematic recording of births, deaths and marriages under secular auspices, provoked the complaint in Parliament that by divorcing the naming of a child from its baptism, the religious rite would be forced into disuse and oblivion. By 1851 even the religious practices of the population had become the subject of centralised statistics, under the more extended scope of the 1851 Census. In 1835 the Merchant Seamen's Act established the first national register of labour, and by 1842 the names, addresses, and characters of 258,000 seamen were listed at the Admiralty. In 1839 the Penny Postage Act set a seal on the development of a national network of postal correspondence. In 1837 a new method of sending a message to a distant name and address was patented: the electric telegraph; and by 1852 the 4,000 miles of telegraph cable in Britain linked not only every major town but stretched across the Channel too.

Such equipment had obvious political uses: the 1846 Act establishing the Electric Telegraph Company included a clause reserving use of the telegraph to the Home Secretary in periods of emergency, and during the Kennington Common demonstration of 10th April 1848 all

messages for transmission had to be accompanied by a note stating: 'Despatch the message delivered by Bearer. G. Grey'.

The development of the telegraph system was closely tied to the initial stages to the expansion of the railways. By 1848 1,800 miles of railway had telegraphic equipment, and the first land-sea telegram, in 1849, was sent under the direction of the South Eastern railways' electrician. The railways, too, had obvious political uses, for the rapid transportation of troops to "disturbed areas" - and most railway companies employed ex-Service officers as engineers, while the official inspectors came from the Royal Engineers.

The social and commercial effects of railway expansion, reaching its peak in the mid-l840s, have been extensively studied, and here we need only recall the basic figures: in 1834 about 200 miles of line were open, by 1850 the figure was 6,500; between 1845 and 1847 8,592 miles of railway were sanctioned by Parliament. From 1844 the amalgamations between railway companies multiplied, and between 1840 and 1848 the main trunk system developed from a rudimentary network to a fairly comprehensive coverage of major towns. In 1844 the report of a Select Committee emphasised the need for a planned national system of railway communication serving the entire country and in the same year the *Quarterly Review* described "the present system" as "developing itself to such an extent –penetrating all districts –superseding all other communications—affecting every species of public and private interests, and acting as the life-blood arteries of the empire."

In Samuel Smiles' view, in 1849, the railways had so shrunk the effective size of the country and so eroded the distinction between town and country that "by their means has Great Britain become as one Great city, the streets of which are the iron roads which now stretch across it in all directions."

When, however, the *Quarterly Review* compares the rail-network with the traditional system of Roman roads and "streets", we are struck by an interesting point. Instead of such labels for main trunk routes as "Watling Street", the rail-network is composed of such units as "The York, Newcastle and Berwick", "The Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire", "The London and Birmingham", "The Leicester and Swannington", "The Bristol and Gloucester". Many of these names became merged into amalgamated companies ("The Midland", "The London and North Western"), but for most of the 1840s the well-publicised railway companies indicated by their very names the connections between distant places: the geography of England could almost be summarised in a list of names of companies and, conversely, the regions and towns of England became the names of familiar public institutions.

Names played a minor, but again interesting, role in the other great processes of amalgamation occurring in the 1840s, in the commercial and financial sectors. The Bank Charter Act of 1844 centralised nearly all note-issue, making the signature of the chief cashier of the Bank of England almost the sole visible guarantee of national currency. Yet the effect of this restriction was reduced by the further development of the private cheque system in the late 1840s – one's own signature playing an increasing role as a form of currency.

Also in 1844, the Joint Stock Companies Registration and Regulation Act required companies (with some exceptions) to file "particulars of name and objects, with the names, addresses and descriptions of the promoters" with the Registrar of Companies. Previous Chartered Companies Acts of 1834 and 1837 had required the naming of only two officers for liability purposes, prompting a plea in 1837 by the Manchester Chamber of Commerce to the Board of Trade, following Bellenden Ker's Report on the Law of Partnership, that a register might be kept containing the place of business, the names, professions and addresses of every individual partner.

The practice of merely "lending" one's name as a "sleeping partner" helped, of course, to raise acutely the problem of limited liability in this period, particularly after the commercial crisis of 1847. During the crisis itself part of the credit imbalance arose from the continued willingness of discount houses to take over semi-fictitious bills "simply because they were guaranteed by the joint-stock bank's signature."

These specific features of the legal, administrative, financial and commercial developments in the 1840s all indicate ways in which a new kind of society was emerging, characterised by an increased sense of the unity and uniformity of the country effected through more elaborated systems of communication and transport. Both people and places were being connected in new ways, and personal knowledge of both was in many cases being extended and changed. The status of personal names was perhaps, in that context, undergoing a curious shift, which it is difficult to recapture as an experience. It is difficult enough to delineate accurately the extent to which broader administrative developments during the period effected, or were meant to effect, an increased uniformity or centralisation of government control, as recent debate indicates.

Contemporary opinion was certainly not unanimous in either approval or disapproval of the change which, however, was generally recognised. In 1844, for example, Charles Buller, M.P., argued against railway legislation because "the system of centralization tended to make men machines instead of making them powers; it made them

slaves instead of free men." In 1867, Bagehot commented in the conclusion of his *The English Constitution* that:

> We look on State action, not as our own action, but as alien action; as an imposed tyranny from without, not as the consummated result of our own organised wishes. I remember at the census of 1851 hearing a very sensible old lady say that ... if Government might be thus inquisitorial .. what .. might they not ask and what might they not do?

In 1861 John Stuart Mill had offered a useful distinction between those last two questions:

> The principal business of the central authority should be to give instruction, of the local authority to apply it. Power may be localized, but knowledge, to be most useful, must be centralized; there must be somewhere a focus at which all its scattered rays are collected.

In *Little Dorrit* (1855-57, ch. X) Dickens had, of course, created a parody of that "focus" in the Circumlocution Office, but we can see an earlier and actual symbol of the "revolution in government" in the extensions to Somerset House in 1835 and 1856, to enable that versatile Government building to house the centralised statistical knowledge of the society. Perhaps the insurrectionaries of 1816 were perversely prophetic when, as Somerville noted, they singled out Somerset House as an appropriate revolutionary headquarters. Ironically, the rebel of 1819, Samuel Bamford, became in 1851 a minor clerk in Somerset House.

Somerville's insertion into that new form of society can be traced not only in his receiving numerous letters from strangers because of the publicity given to his name, or his work for the ACLL, but also in his explicit interest in questions of banking and national finance: he wanted to integrate the Bank of England, taxation, the National Debt, minting, insurance and savings-banks into "one national institution".

Such experiences and concerns are of a radically different kind from those of the closed and local community of the Lothian family into which he was born. In the new social world, he could no longer simply term himself "one of my faither's Simerels". In this new world his name had a public existence, to be protected, written to, registered, exploited, sold and alienated. It is that experience – the subjective side of the social developments exemplified in the ACLL methods and the

processes traced above – that is reflected in the content and structure of Somerville's 1848 *The Autobiography of a Working Man.*

vi : Dombey and Son

It is not, however, only in the work of Somerville himself that these changes are reflected. The League owed part of its success to its application to political agitation of commercial standards of efficiency and modes of organisation. If we look at a major novel, concerned with the world of business success and failure, and written at the same time as Somerville's autobiography, 1846-48, the years of the commercial crisis of 1847, we find there too an interest in the role and significance of names: in Dickens's *Dombey and Son.* The names of Dickens's characters have, of course, been analysed from literary, psychological and linguistic angles. But their full significance in *Dombey* has not been grasped in its relation to the context described above. I can only sketch an analysis here.

The point of the title (in full: *Dealings with the Firm of Dombey and Son, Wholesale, Retail and for Exportation*) is given in the opening pages, but also something more. As Dombey regards his new-born son,

> "The house will once again, Mrs. Dombey," said Mr. Dombey, "be not only in name but in fact Dombey and Son; Dom-bey and Son!"
>
> The words had such a softening influence, that he appended a term of endearment to Mrs. Dombey's name (though not without some hesitation, as being a man but little used to that form of address): and said, "Mrs. Dombey, my - my dear."
>
> A transient flush of faint surprise overspread the sick lady's face as she raised her eyes towards him.
>
> "He will be christened Paul, my - Mrs. Dombey of course."
>
> She feebly echoed, "Of course," or rather expressed it by the motion of her lips, and closed her eyes again.
>
> "His father's name, Mrs. Dombey, and his grandfather's! I wish his grandfather were alive this day!" And again he said "Dom - bey and Son," in exactly the same tone as before.
>
> Those three words conveyed the one idea of Mr. Dombey's life. The earth was made for Dombey and Son to trade in, and the sun and moon were made to give them light. Rivers and seas were formed to float their ships; rainbows to give them promise of fair weather; winds blew for or against their enterprises; stars and planets circled in their orbits, to preserve inviolate a system of which they were the centre. Common abbreviations took new

> meanings in his eyes, and had sole reference to them: A.D. had no concern with *anno Domini*, but stood for *anno Dombei* — and Son. (pp. 9-10)

In this business-centred new world, "Dombey and Son" is a commercial rather than personal designation; Paul, asked about his father, says simply: "He's Dombey and Son" (p. 131); people are subordinated to the "House's name and dignity" (p. 10; cf. p. 336); and even Dombey sees himself as "the present unworthy representative of that name" (p. 108). Partnership in the firm is "reserved solely to inheritors of the great name of Dombey" (p. 510), but since Florence is "in the capital of the House . . merely a piece of base coin that couldn't be invested" (pp. 10-11) she is regarded as not a "Dombey" at all (p. 13 and *passim*). Dombey had remained "Mr. Dombey" to the first Mrs. Dombey throughout their relationship (p. 452) and it is the bestowing of the name of "Dombey" on Edith, as his second wife, that he regards as the greatest possible honour (pp. 455, 480 and *passim*). When, therefore, a separation is refused ("Do you seriously think, Mrs. Dombey, that I would permit my name to be handed about in such a connexion?" - p. 530), Edith's revenge is to sully her name, and his. (p. 611f)

Paul's escape is only through death, however: his christening gave him "all that will soon be left of him on earth - a name" (p. 199). Dombey's own release comes first through bankruptcy ("next night there was a List of Bankrupts published, headed by that name" - p. 650), and through an illness in which he deliriously repeats both Paul's question, "'What is money?", and the "title of his old firm twenty thousand times, and at every one of them, would turn his head upon his pillow" (p. 687). Finally, it is achieved by his reconciliation with his children, in the shape of his grandson named after both him and his son, Paul, (p. 675) and of his grand-daughter Florence. The novel ends with Dombey repeating the name that he so rarely used to mention, and this time the term of endearment is habitual:

> He only answers, "Little Florence! Little Florence!" and smooths away the curls that shade her earnest eyes. (p. 701)

But it is not only Dombey himself that is significantly related to names. The opening passage quoted above continues with a nurse "who did not presume to state her name as a fact, but merely offered it as a mild suggestion" (p. 11) and a Doctor who refers to Mrs. Dombey as "Her Grace the Duchess", "Lady Cankaby" and "the Countess of Dombey", and who always "confuse[s] the names of cases" (p. 12).

Major Bagstock almost confuses his own name in his "little jocularities, of which old Joe Bagstock, old Joey Bagstock, old J. Bagstock, old Josh Bagstock, or so forth, was the perpetual theme: it being, as it were, the Major's stronghold and donjon-keep of light humour, to be on the most familiar terms with his own name" (p. 77 and *passim)*, while his servant, the Native, "had no particular name, but answered to any vituperative epithet" (p. 225). Before servants, indeed, the Major "holds that name [Edith's] too sacred to be made the property of these fellows, or of any fellows" (p. 309).

Mrs. Skewton characteristically forgets names, even when quoting from the Koran: "there is no What's-his-name but Thingummy, and What-you-may-call-it is his prophet!" (p. 314, 236, etc.). In her final illness "she fell into the habit of confounding the names of her two sons-in-law, the living and the deceased; and in general called Mr. Dombey, either 'Grangeby,' or 'Domber,' or indifferently both" (p. 460).

Cousin Feenix, by contrast, always adds a pithy description to anyone he names and expects everyone to know the man: "I dare say my friend Dombey . . may remember Jack Adams, Jack Adams, not Joe; that was his brother. Jack - little Jack - man with a cast in his eye, and slight impediment in his speech - man who sat for somebody's borough..." (pp. 415-6) - even when the man named is -"my friend Shakespeare" (p. 697). At his most nervous moment he stalls by telling a long anecdote about the automatic cheering of Pitt's name whenever it was mentioned in Parliament (p. 690).

Sir Barnett Skettles' main pleasure, on the other hand, is introducing perfect strangers to one another, by a judicious use of visiting cards and letters (p. 280). Even Mrs. Wickham, "with a characteristic alteration of [Walter Gay's] name, invariably spoke of him as 'Young Graves'" (p. 97). Mr. Toots combines the traits of both Sir Barnett and Mrs. Wickham: "Nothing seemed to do Mr. Toots so much good as incessantly leaving cards at Mr. Dombey's door" (p. 258) and on meeting Carker, as "a friend of Mr. Dombey", he "pulls out his card-case, which he never loses an opportunity of using, and hands his name and address to Mr. Carker" (p. 261). He assiduously urges Captain Cuttle to "give me the pleasure of your acquaintanceship" (and even accepts the condition of never mentioning Florence's name to the Captain, pp. 440-1), but continues to call him "Captain Gills". When Walter finally returns he is addressed as "Lieutenant Walters" by Mr. Toots, "who had arrived at that appellation by a process peculiar to himself; probably by jumbling up his Christian name with the seafaring profession, and supposing some relationship between him and the Captain, which would extend, as a matter of course, to their

titles" (p. 565). When Sol Gills also re-appears Mr. Toots is, of course, "much disconcerted by the arrival of anybody appearing to prefer a claim to the name of Gills", until he greets him: '"Although I had not the pleasure of your acquaintance, Mr. – Mr. Sols,' said Mr. Toots, hitting on that name in the inspiration of a bright idea" (p. 637). In mitigation, we ought to remember that the sole imaginative exercise poor Mr. Toots had at Dr. Blimber's academy "was chiefly to write long letters to himself from persons of distinction addressed 'P. Toots, Esquire, Brighton, Sussex,' and to preserve them in his desk with great care" (p. 130) – which is, after all, one way of avoiding the kind of accident that befalls Sol Gills's important letters.

At that academy, of course, such "a dreadful low name" as "Glubb" can only be regarded as that of a "monster" (p. 128), and the rampant regimentation is signalled in Paul's "nice little bed with white hangings, close to the window, on which there was already beautifully written on a card in round text – down strokes very thick, and up strokes very fine – DOMBEY; while two other little bedsteads in the same room were announced, through like means, as respectively appertaining unto BRICGS and TOZER" (p. 130).

In that regard, Blimber's was perhaps marginally better than the Charitable Grinders, where Biler ("otherwise Rob, otherwise Grinder, and always Toodle" (p. 251) and named Biler after his father's railway boiler, p. 24) became number 147, "as if he were a hackney-coach" (p. 57), and had to wear a dreaded uniform. Biler's mother, of course, had to submit, as a first condition for wet-nursing Paul, to a change of name: "While you are here, [said Mr. Dombey] I must stipulate that you are always known as – say as Richards – an ordinary name, and convenient" (p. 21): a name that Miss Tox, years later, still calls her by, while Dickens in the same passage writes of her as Polly and of her husband as Mr. Toodle (p. 435f).

At least in the case of Commander Bunsby there could be no confusion about names, since he erratically intrudes into conversations to announce, as his major contribution, "My name's Jack Bunsby" (p. 277 and *passim*). Even Captain Cuttle is eventually charmed by his own name, since, by the end of the novel, above the Wooden Midshipman, "in golden letters, these names shine refulgent, GILLS AND CUTTLE" and the Captain's "delight in his own name over the door, is inexhaustible. He crosses the street, twenty times a day, to look at it from the other side of the way" (p. 698).

Names have some significance for the structure of the novel also: the relationship between Walter and Florence is partly traced in the names they call each other by (and is clinched by the Captain's inspired inscription, "FLORENCE GAY" (pp. 218, 222, 557, 571, 631), while

the name of "Carker" gradually acquires new overtones in the course of the novel (cf. pp. 149, 247, 594). There is even, in the person of Mr. Morfin, the unknown stranger whose identity is at long last revealed, when his name can be of service (pp. 389, 595-6). Other hidden relationships, between Alice and Edith, are also gradually revealed.

But the structure of the novel is flawed, and the relevant point here is only that Dickens, in a more creative way, shares Somerville's interest in the social role of names, an interest that reflects the specific economic and political context in which both the *Autobiography* and *Dombey and Son* were written. It is noticeable in the novel that it is, on the whole, those characters least representative of the new commercial order in which Dombey exists who have the most eccentric relationship to names. One could also analyse the connections and parallels between names and money in Dombey. compared with the relation between them in Somerville (cf. above) or explore further the different forms of social world indicated by the two phrases "one of my faither's Simerels" and "Dom - bey and Son". The examination of names in Dickens could be extended to, for example, *Hard Times*. *Little Dorrit* and *David Copperfield*. and noted in other novelists, but we can return to Somerville by considering briefly a children's novel that he wrote, concerned, like Dombey. with commercial success and failure.

vii : Roger Mowbray

In 1853 Somerville published a short book entitled *The Life of Roger Mowbray, Merchant Prince of England, and Member of Parliament*. If we check the names of M.P.s and merchants for the relevant dates, there is no such 'Roger Mowbray', and Somerville in any case warns us that "Mowbray" is the subject's mother's maiden name, and that "the real name of her husband and children is for the present withheld, her eldest son, Roger, being now one of the merchant princes of England, and so eminent in the country for which he is a member of parliament that it might be inconvenient to say more directly who he is" (p. 2). This trick of revealing only the mother's maiden name, while seeming to hint at later full identification, is also used in the *Autobiography*.

Other names in the book seem to offer clues. "Sir John Lombard, of London, the great banker" (p. 4), whose son eventually marries Mowbray's sister, and "Mr. Vanderlint, of New York, the eminent capitalist" (p. 103) sufficiently echo the names of actual historical bankers and capitalists (the Lombards, the Vanderbilts), while the information given about Samuel Slater positively invites historical verification: born in Belper in 1768, apprenticed to Strutt in 1782, emigrated to New York in 1789 and, in partnership with "William

Almey and Smith Brown", erected "the first cotton-mill on the English models . . in the United States of America", thanks to Slater's experience with Strutt and Arkwright. As "the originator of cotton-spinning in America" and "the 'father of American manufactures'", Slater has a town named after him, Slaterville near Pawtucket, and Somerville can even quote from an "American biographer (Rev. Dr. L. Blake, of New Jersey, formerly rector of the church in Rhode Island, of which Mr. Slater was a member)" (cf. pp. 89, 91, 95, 88, 98, 94). The outline of Slater's life, in its intersections with actual phases of the cotton-trade and its connections with historical events (cf. e.g. pp. 98, 89-90) is convincing enough – except that the said "Samuel Slater", like "Sir John Lombard" and "Mr. Vanderlint", did not in fact exist under the name given. Yet the representativeness of their careers (like Mowbray's own in some respects) prompts the reader to try to identify the real people Somerville had in mind.

The invitation is almost explicit: Somerville remarks, in connection with Slater, "Strange are the results sometimes of a search after facts and names" (p. 89). Other features of the book, however, clearly denote it as fictional: a fantastic episode involving underground caves, or the obviously 'morality-tale' structure of 'goodies' and 'baddies'. Names are, however, significant in the book not just as partially confusing its genre; there is a clear recognition of the commercial importance of names:

> The firm was now Vanderlint, Mowbray Brothers and Co., it being deemed inexpedient to withdraw the old name entirely. But as a considerable sum of money was to be paid annually for the use of that name, and Roger being sensible that the major part of all the business was now transacted at Liverpool, with Birmingham, Sheffield and the Staffordshire Potteries, and that his name was that which was best known in those towns, he reconstructed the firm in 1824, as "Mowbray Brothers and Co." (p. 105)

Later commercial reasons lead to another change of name, to "Mowbray Brothers, Vanderlint, & Co." (p. 128). The 'bubbles' of 1824 and 1825 affect the firm, "As name after name of projectors and directors were discovered to be names of penniless adventurers" (p. 106), but Mowbray's integrity is revealed in his declaration: "I am here to discharge my brother's liabilities of every description, upon proof of his name being responsible – bubble scrip and all; nothing shall remain with the name of Mowbray on it unpaid" (p. 116). He is threatened with bankruptcy by a joint-stock bank with the Dickensian name, the "Mersey Muddle-Puddle Joint-Stock Banking Company" (p. 117):

"your 'bills were refused two days ago - your name blown upon - your credit done for: think of what may happen to yourself, Mr. Mowbray"; but noble Roger retorts: "May my name and credit perish!" (p. 126).

Earlier, Slater's name had been associated with the older forms of local bank credit (". . whose name was so long familiar to American eyes on the bank notes circulating in the eastern states", p. 88); by the end of the book, Mowbray's name is also a source of credit:

> I tell you that there is not a breeze or tide moving in the British seas, but carries out or floats inward some ocean-going ship of his; that round the circle of the globe the sun never sets upon his fleets; that in all the civilised world where bales of British merchandise have a market, the name of Roger Mowbray passes like gold from the Mint. (pp. 178-9)

This weak echo of the opening pages of *Dombey* again reminds us of the connection between names and money, and that the passage purports to come from a speech proposing Mowbray as an M.P. indicates another fusion: of industrial capital with political power, a mutation already latent in the ACLL and soon a significant phenomenon in English parliamentary politics.

Certain specific elements in *Roger Mowbray* clearly come direct from Somerville's own experience: the episode of the hawk, the meeting of the brothers, the Government offer of credit to a Liverpool firm in 1837. But the point to be emphasised is that the "biography" as a whole, in its content and structure, reflects, like the *Autobiography* and *Dombey and Son*, a wider commercial and political context of which the Bank Charter Act and Company Act of 1844, the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, the commercial crisis of 1847 and the collapse of Chartism in 1848 are some of the constituent elements. The underlying connection between names and money in all three texts, examples of different genres of writing, is also an element in that overall situation of the 1840s and early 1850s.

viii : conclusion

We can now, in conclusion, both locate some of Somerville's other work briefly in that same context and return finally to his autobiographical writings. Somerville's collected newspaper articles of the 1840s and his "Letters from Ireland", published as *The Whistler at the Plough* in 1852, his *Free Trade and the League: A Biographic History* (2v., 1853) and such short pieces as the superb *A Cry From Ireland* (1843) are

all characterised by an emphasis on the specific case, on the living people involved. The strength of the 'Whistler' articles comes from the embedding of Somerville's economic analyses in particular conditions, specified farms, named landowners; the history of the League is constructed as a series of vignettes and mini-biographies of "the pioneers of freedom of opinion, commercial enterprise, and civilisation"; *A Cry from Ireland* is an individual cry, the detailed and moving case of one particular tenant persecuted by his landlord. And, in similar vein, Somerville finally offered his own life as an individual example.

The 1860 Canadian edition of his autobiography has the unexpected title: *Conservative Science of Nations (Preliminary instalment) Being the first complete narrative of Somerville's Diligent Life in the Service of Public Safety in Britain.* It was intended in part to clear his name of various accusations by a journalist and to "introduce" the author to a Canadian public after his emigration, but it was also part of a wider propaganda for what Somerville called "Conservative Science", the main tenet of which asserted "that the human being is prime constituent of public wealth; and that the guardianship of human happiness is the true function of any Political Economy, worthy of being called a Conservative Science."The purpose of the "Diligent Life" was "to retrieve Political Economy from a chaos of crudities, in its austere materialism . . to demand, that as guardian of public wealth, it obey the absolute logic of its position, and take cognisance of the prime element of wealth, the human being."

This view of political economy Somerville dates from 1848; he quotes a letter from John Bright about Somerville's proposal for a series of tracts, and comments:

> In the forgoing, Mr. Bright said: "If you succeed in convincing them (the workers) that non-interference by law with *labour* and with prices, whether of *labour* or of other commodities &c." In these words he confounded two very different things as one. He meant by *labour* the *person*, – the personal health, life, and limb of the factory worker, as well as the skill which brought forth the products of the spindle and loom at which the worker was employed. I separated the *person* of the worker from *work* and *skill*.

In this "economic heresy", as Somerville calls it, he is close, in feeling at least, to Dickens (Paul recognises that money cannot save the life of his mother), to Ruskin (for whom the only true wealth is life itself) and even to Marx, who analysed both the alienation of the worker from his own work and skill and the unique nature of labour as

a market-commodity. And though Somerville was, for example, drastically confused about the nature of capital and its specific forms, using the same term to cover very different phenomena, his emphasis at this point is a necessary one in political economy. In a society increasingly grasped in abstract terms, where money dominated the modes of economic exchange and the people as a nation were coming to be connected as a network of mere names and addresses, to be exploited for bureaucratic political and commercial purposes, it was important to re-assert the value of the specific, whole, living human person. It was precisely that point which the concentration on the individual case in his newspaper writings was designed to make, as vividly as possible, and it was that concern which Somerville singled out when, in *Conservative Science* (p. 22) he summarised his life:

> As for Radicals, Whigs, Tories, and any such party alliances, I never was of them. Mine has not been a life of small politics. Much of my literary life has been spent and my brain worn to incapacity for literary labour, in rescuing the science of Political Economy from the soulless materialism which had made it, in mouths of Whigs and Radicals, odious to the People. It has been my self-imposed task to humanize and christianize Political Economy. I assert man to be the primary element in national wealth.

The analysis earlier of his written account of his life in the *Autobiography* allows us to see how that particular "literary labour" reflected, in a curious way, some of the problems of mid-nineteenth century society which a "soulless materialism" was only partly, and uneasily, aware of.

Perhaps we can conclude that just as Wordsworth and Coleridge, at the beginning of the century, finally found the most amenable and appropriate form for their projected philosophical poem and 'Organum vere Organum' respectively to be an autobiographical one, so Somerville, unable to engender an adequate work on Political Economy in terms compatible with mid-century theory and practice, could only finally offer the lesson of his own life instead – as someone who had not only whistled at the plough but had also experienced in an acute fashion the alienating distance between public role and private person increasingly possible in a new form of social world.

As Somerville himself remarked: "Strange are the results sometimes of a search after facts and names."

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Chapter 3 : James Dawson Burn
'wandering to leave time behind'

i) Journeys and families

ii) A sense of class

iii) Political involvement and attitudes

iv) Respectability ?

v) Hovering between styles

vi) Form and accidents

vii) Aspects of the historical context

viii) Literary strands

ix) Conclusion

Unless otherwise specified, page references are to *The Autobiography of a Beggar Boy,* William Tweedie, London, 1855. See the Primary Bibliography for details of other texts by Burn..

J. D. Burn's life seems, from his *Autobiography of a Beggar Boy* (1855) to have been one of constant movement, first with his mother and stepfather, as a travelling beggar and itinerant trader (e.g. p. 16), then, after breaking with his parents (pp. 48-50), as a wanderer in search of work: 54 miles in one day (p. 101), 62 miles another day (p. 84), 300 miles with only 2/3⅛d to support him (p. 98), 1,400 miles for a new job (p. 119). Even after his marriage, he travels: for the Oddfellows Society (e.g. p. 145) or for trade journals (e.g. p. 175). In his sixties he uproots his family and spends three years in America (cf. TY and 1882, pp. 256-349). In his seventies he finds stable employment for ten years, the longest continuous job of his life - but, almost symbolically, as a clerk with the Great Eastern Railway Company (1882, p. 442). So constant is the impression of movement in the autobiography that the reader is surprised at Burn's claim to have lived in and around Glasgow for nearly twenty years (p. 163).

The trite description of life as a "journey" (p. 20) has for him a specific accuracy. He can wryly accept his affinities with the "Wandering Jew" (p. 135) and, looking back, claim to have been "one in five hundred thousand, if not a million, of old George the Third's subjects who had made the grand tour of England and Scotland!! " (p. 177). Though at this point he "flatters himself" with that claim, other reactions are at times equally strong: he can "be ashamed" of his unstable position (e.g. p. 84), or recognise that his vagrant past makes others suspicious of him (p. 104), but occasionally he argues that if he "had adopted the motto of *Ne sutor ultra crepidam* ... you would not have had the benefit of my enlarged experience" (p. 174).

The motto was, in any case, inappropriate: Burn at first had no trade to abandon, and his travels were not only territorial. He moved through one occupation after another: in rapid succession, for example, tinker, miner, farm-labourer, smuggler, harvester, shearer, office-boy (pp. 83-4). When he finally served the apprenticeship he longed for, it was the "second grand crisis" of his life (p. 104) and always looked back to as "the grand turning-point" (p. 198), but though he became a time-served hatter, that trade rapidly underwent basic changes (p. 144; cf. 1882, suppl., p. 508), restricting his chances of employment, and again he turned to a variety of jobs, for example dock-labouring and freelance lecturing within the same week, meanwhile selling copies of his own *History of Odd Fellowship* (Glasgow, 1846) to meet immediate needs (p. 165).

The social disparity between the personae he adopted on that last occasion highlights the tension he constantly tried to overcome: his

repeated aim was to "be looked upon as an honest member of society" (p. 82), to find a "resting-place" that he "might become a recognisable member of society" (p. 83). One can trace the roots of this in part to his early experience of isolation even within his own family - an urge to be accepted that was never quite met: he describes himself as a "stranger" (pp. 41,82) in his own family - or, rather, families, for he was, he says ironically, "blessed with three fathers and two mothers" (p. 82); his mother and step-father transferred him to his real father and the latter's new wife, in Ireland (p. 39), and on meeting his mother again he finds her with a third 'husband' (p. 82). He recalls being kidnapped by a stranger, and comments that his "affectionate mother", in refusing to accept £100 in exchange for him, "stood between me and the flood which leads on to fortune" (p. 24) - which hardly communicates an enthusiastic sense of belonging to his original family. He remembers his mother and stepfather casually transferring him to a strange family for three months, and his sense of being "cast adrift upon the world" (p. 37). His own break with his (Irish) family is equally casual: sent out to gather turf, he finds himself on the main road to Belfast and, "after standing reflecting for a few minutes", "turned my face towards Belfast and my back to a friendless home", from that time "tearing two syllables from my name" to "sever the only remaining link that bound me to my family" (p. 47). His relation to his real father had in any case been one of hatred, even before knowing him, to such an extent that he records later wanting him to be drowned (p. 43). The ramifications of these family relationships could be tracked further - in the emphasis for example that he later placed on his own domestic life (e.g. p. 113) -but they are also part of a wider pattern, with various facets.

ii : a sense of class

Burn's comment about being a "stranger" in his own family, for example, can be seen as one instance of a general theme in his work, for the notion of "stranger" occurs often, sometimes with a positive value - being helped and befriended by total strangers (pp. 88, 97, 101) - or, in a later work, as the character he gives his imagined reader, a stranger to be introduced to the towns described by Burn (CE., pp. 57,62,69,101,117, etc.). The impression given in that later work, that Burn is intimately and confidently familiar with a variety of towns, their history, people, firms, trades, geography, etc, and is therefore able to act as guide for his reader, is noticeably different from his description of his first visit to London, which communicates a sense of frightened isolation: his reaction to this new experience is to

"wander along the dull, hazy streets" for two days and nights.

> Through the course of the second day, I continued walking on, and sometimes unconsciously found myself at the same place from which I set out. I had no aim, and must have been looking for a miracle. The second night came, and I shivered along the long, cold, dreary streets [passing] young men, haggard and prematurely old, creeping along the streets in genteel rags.

Burn describes himself on that occasion as "wandering to leave time behind [him] in the loud silence of the night in the largest city in the world" (p. 96). The disturbing novelty of the experience is felt in the uncharacteristically tangled mixture of metaphors:

> I soon found out a mystery which has been solved by thousands before me; namely, that London was far too large for me. I was fairly lost in a wilderness of human beings; I was a mere atom in a huge mountain of humanity I and as it were an unclaimed particle of animation - a thing that belonged to nobody. In fact, I looked upon myself as one of the outside links in the chain of civilised society. If I could have become a part of the monument somebody would have looked at me, and have set their wits to find out my use. (pp. 95-96)

This is the same kind of experience that fascinated Charles Dickens, to whom the 1855 autobiography is dedicated. The astounding extent to which Burn later made himself familiar with minute aspects of English (and .American) society seems part of a continuing attempt to feel 'at home' in a world in which he inherited no firm place. The supplement to the 1882 edition of the *Autobiography.* for example, gives micro-histories of envelopes, buttons, farming tools, needles, bicycles, tinned food, shop-windows, advertising, photography, as well as more obvious features such as railways and population changes.(1882, suppl., pp. 510, 512, 519, 523, 537, 540, 545, 547, 589, 530)

This lack of an inherited "place" (p. 83) is not simply geographical (national as well as local: he was born of Irish parents in Scotland, yet lived often in England, with three years in America), or a matter of having no secure trade. It also includes a shifting sense of which social group he belongs to: in 1858 he presented himself as both a working man and an employer (CE., pp. 98-99); in 1865 he described himself as "one of their own order" when speaking of "the working classes" (TY., p. ix); in *A Glimpse.* published after 1867 (cf. G., pp. iii, 77) but not otherwise dated, he remarks in the context of comments on Trade

Unions that "however unpalatable my remarks may be, they are given with the honest intention to serve the class of which I am a humble member" (G., p. 124) and later he claims that he has been discussing issues "from a working man's stand-point of view" (G., p. 153); in 1882 he saw himself as neither working-class nor with the financial means to be above that class (1882., p. 243). Nevertheless, in the autobiography of 1855, he is lucidly conscious that there are class differences which permeate most aspects of life, and that those from one class can rarely penetrate the sense of life felt by those from another:

> Like a large number of my own class, I was born in poverty, nursed in sorrow, and reared in difficulties, hardships and privations. It is only such as have passed through the various substrata of civilised society who can justly appreciate the feelings and sufferings of the thousands who continually live as it were by chance. . . . The man who can dine is very differently situated to the poor wretch who, after he has had one meal of victuals, has no idea where or when he may be blessed with another! Those members of society who are blessed with a regular supply of food and raiment may be said to be antipodes to the accidental feeders, and their modes of thinking, in every sense of the word, as opposite as are their ways of living! (p. 2; cf. p. 128)

It is in the context of an "accidental feeding" that Burn later quotes a "good old gentleman" who, "soliloquising to himself . . said, 'Poor bairn! Poor bairn! One-half of the world does not know how the other half lives!'" (p. 54). Perhaps with such gentlemen in mind as his readers. Burn elsewhere remarks: "If you will imagine to yourself a number of people obliged to live upon short allowance of food, and forced to receive an additional member without a corresponding addition of victuals, you will be able to form a pretty correct idea of my reception in the congenial home of my father" (p. 39). Another well-meaning gentleman's efforts receive the comment: "As a proof that the colonel had no idea of how we were living he purchased me a splendid suit of clothes . . Poor old man! he little thought he was dressing me like a puppet for the charity market!" (p. 19).

The difference between groups is not confined to material circumstances or financial means (Burn frequently notes his own wages, e.g. 1/- a week - p. 105, and also details election expenses totalling £190,000 -p. 110); it extends to their moral codes: "I have found that nearly every class of people in the kingdom have a moral code of their own" - including pickpockets (p. 17). But in the case of

morals, argues Burn, the difference covers a basic similarity: "I have seen a beggar barter his wife for a pot of ale, and I have known a nobleman who got clear of his better half for 40s damages" (p. 17). Fortunately, according to Burn, it is goodness that is common, ultimately: "Although I have had to fight my way through a busy world, where all classes of society were continually engaged in looking after their own affairs, I am happy to bear my humble testimony to the general diffusion of that god-like feeling which so closely allies man to his Creator", sympathetic charitableness (p. 51).

To some extent, Burn analyses political differences in the same way, except that charitableness is a hope expressed rather than a fact described. He comments on the agrarian "excitement" of 1830, and though he calls "midnight incendiary" activity "worse than madness" and an ambush on special constables "diabolical" and "infernal", he prefaces his condemnation with the explanation: "When large bodies of men are reduced to suffering from the want of even common necessaries of life, it cannot be supposed, that they are in a condition to be reasoned with by men whose stomachs are well lined" (p. 120). Comparing the Luddism of 1830 with that of 1819, he elaborates further: "Let us suppose either the middle or the upper classes in society exposed to the pangs of hunger, without the means of relief, while surrounded by abundance, - I would ask what would they do?" The rhetorical question is left unanswered; Bum draws only a moral and philosophical generalisation, that "man's nature will ever remain the same, and that his conduct will be regulated by the various circumstances of his position" (p. 121). In *A Glimps*e, this emphasis on a basic human nature becomes a reiterated position: he comments that the working classes are "not one whit more selfish than the people who formed the upper strata" (G., p. 4) and that he has "found very little difference in the conduct of men, whatever class they belonged to, when their real or supposed vested interests were interfered with" (G., p. 69). For Burn at that period, "There is no difference in feelings of selfishness between the employers and the employed" (G., p. 120). This analysis, in terms of selfishness, is clearly a political as well as moral interpretation, but Burn's political stance in the *Autobiography* is more explicit and specific.

iii : political involvement and attitudes

We can analyse in some detail Burn's reactions to two political moments, the 1832 Reform Act and Chartism, since he treats of both at some length in the autobiography. Describing the 1832 Reform agitation, he begins his account with: "In this year (1831) the agitation

for a reform in the House of Commons was gathering strength over the whole of Great Britain" (p. 123). The spread of agitation is not only geographical; every social class is represented: the numerous meetings "though composed generally of the working classes, were supported by several members of the aristocracy, many of the liberal gentlemen, and more especially by large numbers of the influential merchants and manufacturers." In a passage omitted in the 1882 edition, he then analyses the pre-Reform Act situation as one in which the "good old self-willed Tories", with their control of "power and patronage" - a power "frequently used to crush the rights and liberties of the people" - were opposed by the Whigs, "numerically strong" with "considerable moral power" and heartily supported by "the wording population", yet lacking the "machinery" wielded by the Tories (p. 123). Against this background. Burn sketches the stages of his own involvement: he was elected hatters' delegate to the Trades Committee of Western Scotland, then to the Radicals' "Central Committee"; becoming "seized with a wild enthusiasm, and for a time politically mad", he "took an active part in all the proceedings of both the Whig and the Radical parties in Glasgow for several years" (p. 124), with "rarely a single night in the week . . . not occupied, either in sub-committees, or on the general committee" (p. 125). After six months he was "elected a member of the standing committee of the Reform Association", composed of "the resident gentry, merchants and manufacturers of the Whig party" (p. 126). During 1832 he "had the marshalling of the whole of [the] out-door displays" in Glasgow, including one demonstration involving "200,000 people". The way Burn envisages his role at this time is interesting: he speaks of the Trades Committee as "an excellent school for young beginners in the science of oratory and public debating" (p. 124) and of the demonstrations as "a display of self-possessed determination", marked with "solemn import" rather than "boisterous mirth" (p. 126); on the largest meeting he comments "I was somewhat afraid that the leaders had raised a power they could not subdue" (p. 127). In other words, the mode of politics he at heart accepts is that of the debating chamber and committee, with occasional emphasis given to a position by massive numerical support, that support, however, hopefully under the control of "leaders" who, initially "elected", are finally seen as those who have "raised" the masses in support and ought to be able to "subdue" them.

Given this version of politics, it is no surprise that Burn later objected to a mode of political agitation that threatened to go beyond debating-chamber forms, the Chartist movement. Before then he had in any case, it seems, become somewhat disillusioned with Reform:

immediately after the Reform Act he campaigned on behalf of Sir D. K. Sandford, who failed as a Whig candidate at Glasgow and was then elected Tory member for Paisley, to make only one speech in the Commons before being "crushed" into parliamentary silence by Daniel O'Connell (p. 12). Omitting this incident in the 1882 edition of the autobiography, Burn retained his generalised comment: "Since then the country has had frequent opportunities of being amused at the Jim Crow gyrations of high-sounding politicians" (p. 128). A more specific judgement, however, closer in tone to Chartist accusations, he simply excised in 1882: "After the passing of the Reform Bill the Whigs soon assumed all the airs of the old Tory party, and their political conduct was characterised, in many instances, by greater deception and tergiversation than ever marked the conduct of their opponents" (p. 130). Despite this, in the General Election of 1837, he was again active in the Glasgow Radical Association, writing on its behalf to William Aytoun, Arthur Roebuck and Perronet Thompson, but the election machinations further disillusioned him. Dr. John Taylor, whom he had known since 1832 (p. 128), was suspected of accepting Tory overtures to split the 'Liberal' vote, and Bum was involved in an acrimonious public meeting where, before 5,000 people, he successfully defended himself against counter-accusations from Taylor (p. 131). The fracas alienated the Radical clientele of the tavern Burn owned, and he was deflected into financial and other domestic problems.

By the next phase of Chartism, Burn's first wife had died and he had married again within a year; he had also transferred his tavern business from Glasgow to Greenock. The chronology of his account is slightly puzzling, but what is important is his attitude. He is initially cautious:

> "While I was in Greenock I had in some measure identified myself with the Charter movement, but up to that time the agitation had been conducted upon something like rational principles" (p. 137).

When, however, he describes the "People's Parliament" and its plan for a "sacred month" (a national strike) his language is virulent: "satanic", "hellish suggestion", "infamy", "infatuation". He summarises his speech from the chair of a meeting in Greenock, in which he proclaimed that "one of the immediate consequences . . would be, to let loose the whole vagabondage of the country, who would rob, plunder, and murder the innocent and defenceless members of society" - for saying which, he "had the pleasure of being branded with the character of a renegade and a traitor to the cause" (pp. 137-8). Yet, magnanimously, he does not blame the "working classes", only the "mercenary horde" and "set of hungry knaves" who were the

"majority" of the National Convention. His particular disgust is reserved for O'Connor's Land Plan (p. 138), possibly reflecting in this the direct experience or disappointment of a man who had lived in the earliest two of the four Scottish 'Districts' in that plan. In sharp contrast to his praise for the debating workmen of the 1832 Trades Committee, the leaders in the Chartist movement are nearly all dismissed with the comment: "if these men were honest, they must have been mad, and if not mad, no conduct could have been more infamous" (p. 138); only John Collins, whom Burn knew, William Lovett and Henry Vincent escape censure - and Collins is, noticeably, described as "respectable" (p. 139).

It is that "respectable" that gives the clue. Burn was, on his own account, no minor figure in local working-class politics: his tavern in Glasgow seems to have been a Radicals' gathering-place (cf. above), and it was "some political acquaintances" who persuaded him to re-open a tavern in Greenock; in 1837 he can "call a meeting of the Liberal party for the following evening" which 5,000 people attend (p. 131); at the Greenock meeting he "was pressed to take the chair" (p. 137); he was active also in Trade Union circles, first at local level, then as Glasgow delegate to various national meetings of the Journeymen Hatters' union (pp. 128-9). He can not only claim to have known the leaders of the great Glasgow Cotton Spinners Strike of 1837 but to be "personally acquainted with many of the men whose names figured in these exciting times" (p. 137), including the national Charter leaders. Yet, writing in 1854-5, he heavily criticises these acquaintances and even in 1882, when his attacks on the Tories and Whigs are toned down or omitted, he revises his onslaught on the working class leaders only to the extent of an explanatory footnote on "sacred month".

There are, indeed, traces of a tension in his attitude: one feels, in his criticism of O'Connor's Land Plan, that if the scheme had succeeded, Burn's opinion might have been different (p. 138), and something of the same sense lingers over his comments on the "intended emeute of 1848": "The leaders upon that occasion were utterly contemptible, and are not worthy a place in the history of small political events, or even to be named with the insane but honest leaders at Bonny Muir. At all events, they were not like Ossian's heroes, 'who never court the battle, nor shun it when it comes'" (p. 139). But by 1855 he was explicitly on the side of the "middle classes": the fifth chapter or "Letter" (cf. below, sec. vi), concerned in part with Peterloo, ends with a eulogy on "the extraordinary energy and directing power" of the "middle class element" which "during the last thirty years" "have attained for it a moral force unprecedented in the history of the country", so that "whatever social advantages we now enjoy over those of the preceding

age, are in great measure due to the well-timed exertions of this now powerful class" (p. 79). It is, then, no surprise to find, in the penultimate, reflective Letter, that Burn erects a defence of hereditary property and argues that more equitable distribution of wealth would be detrimental to society; the haziness of his notion of class at this point is clear when he further remarks that "it matters very little whether the riches be held by one class or another, inasmuch as there will always be a select few who will possess great wealth"; one's real consolation, he urges, is to be found in "friendship" and "the human family" (pp. 184-5).

This support for middle class efforts and values has to be seen partly in the light of the particular configuration of Glasgow Chartism during these years. As in other Chartist centres, but perhaps more acutely, there was a two-fold struggle within Glasgow Chartism, over the issue of moral force versus physical force and over the role of middle class allies.

These issues tended to become confused, but with no simple demarcation of middle class Chartists supporting only moral force policies; only rarely, however, as in the great demonstration of 21st May 1838, was there a simple fusion of all the elements. Burn's particular hostility to O'Connor and his horror at violence, even industrial violence, would seem to place him despite his friendship with Taylor, the Scottish Feargus - on the side of the conciliatory middle class groups who opposed O'Connor, and his approach to Roebuck in 1837 and membership of John Bright's Parliamentary Election Committee in 1852 (p. 175) would support this interpretation. So too, indirectly, would his concentration, from 1839 onwards, on the Oddfellows Society rather than on political activity; pre-occupation with 'social' efforts and co-operative and friendly societies was in any case characteristic of one strand of Glasgow Chartism, a strand that Burn certainly regarded as perfectly "respectable" (cf. p. 141).

iv : respectability?

The context for this pro-middle class attitude is also, of course, personal; as was noted above, his autobiography reveals a constant urge for a respectable "place" in society. A direct connection between this personal urge and his political activities interestingly affects the final section of his autobiography. He writes:

> I am now about introducing you to the last scene in the shifting drama of my truly chequered life, up to the present time. In the month of May, 1853, I was offered employment from a gentleman

> to whom I had been recommended by a mutual friend. The conditions of the engagement offered were more liberal than I had been accustomed to for some time; I was therefore not slow in accepting the offer. The character of the business was perfectly new to me; but I had every confidence in being equal to it, and have since justified my own anticipations, and the expectations of my employer. Since I have been in my present business, I have travelled over the most of England and Scotland, and have therefore passed over many of those scenes that were once familiar to me; and have had many opportunities of comparing the past with the present state of things. (p. 175)

In the last paragraph of the book he again alludes to the "present business":

> "For the last two years, I have held a situation of considerable responsibility, during that time I have come in contact with many of the first class commercial men in the United Kingdom" (p. 200).

What is interesting is that the nature of this "present business" is never disclosed. A reasonable initial presumption is that Burn is preserving his anonymity. But he also makes his employer anonymous - "a gentleman". The 1832 edition, however, adds the name "Mr. Hill" (1882., p. 220). Later, it is mentioned that Mr. Hill was once editor of the *Northern Star* (1882., p. 254). The supplementary survey of social improvements, etc., in that edition deals at one point with "trade protection" societies and businesses, and mentions that from 1838 "a weekly list of Scottish registered protest bills, applications for sequestrations, trust deeds, etc., was published in Edinburgh, and supplied to subscribers only." This *Black List* was compiled by "Mr. William Hill" (1882, suppl., p. 555), who in 1853 (the date of Burn's employment by "Mr. Hill") "added the English lists of weekly mercantile defalcations to his Scottish publication, and opened offices in London, Dublin, and several large towns"; this "new *Mercantile Gazette* was charged two guineas a year, and when the debt-collecting was added the charge was three guineas"; this "system of espionage" was eventually sold to a Mr. Stubbs in 1860 (1882, suppl., pp. 555, 554,556). With this further information one suspects a rather different motive for not mentioning the nature of his "present business" in 1855. In the final pages of the autobiography Burn is claiming to have achieved his goal of respectability: he emphasises that "My great struggle in the battle of life was to find my proper position in society" (p. 198) and concludes "You have now before you an honest

history of my life up to the present time" from which the reader can learn "what energy and determination ... are able to accomplish" (p. 199). This sounds impressive - but one wonders how many of his contemporary readers would have accepted an agent of a "system of espionage" and "debt-collecting" as "respectably" employed. Moreover, his employer had not only, as the Rev. 'William Hill, once edited the *Northern Star* but had in 1842 been arrested for "uttering seditious language" and on his release in 1843 had been feted as a hero at numerous Chartist banquets throughout the country. As late as 1847 Hill was editing the *North British Weekly Express*. "The Only Democratic Newspaper Published in Scotland", which became the property of the leading Edinburgh Chartists in late 1847. To have identified Hill as his employer, even in 1855, would have made his "history" slightly more "honest" but would surely have raised further doubts as to Burn's achieved "respectability".

v : hovering between styles

Burn's political opinions and his lack of a secure social position are now adequately clear, and we have seen one instance where both play a part in affecting the autobiography. A detailed examination of the general characteristics of his style also reveals a reflection of his social and perhaps political position. One immediately noticeable feature of his style is the constant use of deliberately misapplied words, most frequently adjectives chosen to indicate their opposite, for ironic or other purposes. Some examples are simple: the intended sense is clear, and the effect is mildly wry or humorous, as in the various anecdotes related on pages 26 - 27.

After a minor quarrel with Burn, his brother "had sufficient tact to make the most of it in representing the matter to his father, as he knew I should be well punished"; in fact, his father slashed at Burn three times with a long Spanish knife on hearing the complaint. Immediately following this, Burn relates how on another occasion, while enjoying a truant swim, he "behind the gaunt form of my dear father, with a smile of satisfactory vengeance curling about his mouth", striding towards him; Burn runs away, naked, with father in pursuit; he comments: "Before I could reach home I had to run fully three-quarters of a mile, and to make the journey pleasantly exciting, one-half of the distance was through the leading street in the town." In these cases it is obvious what linguistic values are being overturned. But when Burn writes of his foster father that his "health and constitution had been sacrificed before the altar of patriotism and glory in the Peninsular war" (p. 3) the tone hovers between sarcasm and piety. A somewhat similar hesitancy is

provoked in the reader when Burn, himself a beggar boy, describes those beggars proficient in: heart-tugging stories and personae as "artistes" who were "no mean ornaments to their honourable profession" (p. 9). The exact tone of this is indecipherable, but it is similar to later descriptions of begging, the intention of which is slightly less implicit, for example: "The begging trade, with its gross deceptions . . I believe was somewhat repugnant to the feelings of my parents; whether they left the business from conscientious scruples, or from a feeling of independence, I really do not know, but . . we became transformed into respectable travelling merchants, or . . pedlars" (p. 25), or, of an overnight stay in Ely, "while there I had a very flattering invitation to join two genteel young men in their regular *cadging* trade, both of whom had successfully passed their probation in the profession. After we had gone to bed . . the two youths fully initiated me into the mysteries of their business" (p. 99). The choice of middle-class terms ("begging trade", "left the business", "respectable travelling merchants", "profession", "business"; for what are decidedly not middle-class "businesses" simultaneously hints a question-mark as to the difference between "respectable" and disreputable ways of earning a living, and suggests sufficient irony to allow the middle-class reader his instinctively contemptuous dismissal. That the choice of vocabulary is deliberate seems clear from the immediate switch, in the continuation of the last passage, to blatantly slang expressions, "*quod... tin ... dodge ... cove ... nabbed*", all italicized and with a parenthetical translation ("gaol") added for "*quod*". The relative uncertainty of tone and the vocabulary shift both indicate Burn's own uneasy position between two social worlds, two sets of values.

A different context for a similar device is given in his description of his temporary transfer to a remote farm "completely isolated from the civilised world" (p. 37); the contrast between these "two worlds", civilised and remote, is given linguistically: the same paragraph juxtaposes rural dialect ("auldest callant ... gang ... nowt ... twa") and artificial or inflated language ("a short palaver . . recalled from my aqueous sports and was requested to dress, not for dinner, but for a journey . . my stereo-typed dinners"). One sentence fuses both: "My dinner consisted of barley bannocks, a whang of skimmed milk cheese, facetiously denominated Peg Walker. from the peculiar cohesive character of its particles." The effect of the language shifts is slight, but hardly pure accident. It is unmistakeable in some instances where Burn uses middle-class phrases to expose, and challenge, middle-class assumptions - for example, "When I retired from business, it was into the private life of poverty" (p. 162) or, very neatly, "My new employer very unfortunately laboured under the *sin* of poverty" (p. 104, Burn's

emphasis).

This juxtaposition of two worlds, two vocabularies, two sets of value-assumptions, to challenge one of the elements involved, can also operate on a larger scale. The best example is the poker-face paragraph:

> About this time there were two little circumstances occurred, which were matters of gossip for the time being. The one was the coronation of William the Fourth, and the other was the death of Sandy McKay, in a prize-fight between him and Simon Byrne. Just twelve months after this, Byrne was repaid in the same coin by being killed in a pugilistic encounter with Deaf Burke. (pp. 118-9)

The sly, deflating humour, equating in importance the king's coronation and local boxing-matches, hardly requires comment.

Burn's reluctant ability to move in the separate worlds of working-class labourer and respectable author and lecturer (cf. above, p. 127) also reveals itself in the range and type of allusions and quotation he draws upon. Some rest upon an acquaintance with what is most briefly described as folk-lore (e.g. "the Coventry of life", p. 20; "the Newgate Calendar", p. 21; "like Philip", p. 27; "Van Wooden Block's cork leg", p. 85; perhaps even the reference to Bonny Muir, p. 139); others show a "civilised" knowledge of accepted literature (Burns, p. 3; Goldsmith, p. 4; Cervantes, p. 25; Wordsworth, p. 46; the comments on Addison, Cobbett, Burns, Pope, Voltaire, Paine, Byron, Cowper, Swift, Homer, etc., p. 187ff); references to Tannahill (pp. 46, 189), the siege of Jerusalem (p. 121) and some unattributed verses (e.g. p. 32) perhaps span both 'cultures' as do some of the 'radical' writers above. This autodidactic acquaintance with two literary cultures, and the jostling of life-style it implies, deeply influences Burn's style in his characteristic descriptive passages. Analysis is inevitably lengthy and a few examples only can be examined. His introduction to one anecdote is typical:

> Upon another occasion, some time after this, my father had been drinking in Lauder, a small town in the south of Scotland. We left this place in consequence of the active character of some of his amiable propensities. When we left Lauder my mentor was in a state of beastly intoxication. We took the Edinburgh road - I should think by chance. (p. 12)

The inflation of certain phrases is obvious ("in consequence of the active character of"..etc.), set against the direct and even colloquial narrative of the first and last sentences quoted. Their purpose is, I feel,

deliberate and reasonably successful: in their context, "beastly" evokes an exact contrast with "mentor" and reverberates back over the euphemistically soft "amiable propensities", disclosing the hard and sordid edge concealed in the delicate, latinate phrase, underlining the 'amorous' overtones of the gently sarcastic and ambiguous "amiable".

An equally brief passage shows Burn again using inflated language with serious effect:

> Your professional pickpocket looks down with contempt upon a knight of the *scranbag*, and the *highflyer* turns up his genteel proboscis at the common cadger. A lady who may have shared bed, board, and affections of an aristocratic letter-writer, would feel herself as much humbled in allying herself with a plebeian *charity irritato*r. as my Lord Noodle's some time affection receiver would have in espousing one of his lordship's ploughmen. (p. 17)

This comment, illustrating that "nearly every class of people in the kingdom have a moral code of their own, and every body of men its own standard of perfection", is more complex than it perhaps appears. The juxtaposition of street slang and outrageously elegant terminology is obvious; but "proboscis" not only deflates the highflyer by its exaggeration; it also parodies a linguistic fastidiousness that in certain circles refuses to acknowledge the common human condition (in the matter of noses, for example) that the structure of these two sentences asserts. For the effect of the sentences, read together, is to elide the class-barriers: "knight" is obviously metaphorical, and the highflyer is clearly a great deal removed socially from my Lord Noodle; but the mind is tempted to complete the phrase "Lord Noodle - and his Lady": the "lady" who opens the second sentence tends to insinuate herself into his lordship's arms, but a second thought recalls that she is allied to "an aristocratic letter-writer", whose status is highly ambiguous; does "aristocratic" refer to accepted social scales, conjuring up some Byronic figure indulging himself perhaps with a high class prostitute, or is the reference to the hierarchy of the street, the lady being the respectable matron of a literate artisan, or is "letter-writer" merely some sophisticated variant on the role of "charity irritator"? And why the odd phrase "some time affection receiver" for my Lord Noodle's companion; is she perhaps not his Lady at all? As the figures evoked in these two sentences mingle themselves promiscuously in the imagination, the way is prepared for Burn's quiet revision of his opening dictum, and the real point is made: whatever the moral code, "in comparing men's actions and motives, I have found that the difference is very frequently only in the degree" - the beggar and the nobleman, as

he concludes, will both barter their wives away.

A less successful example perhaps shows Burn trying too hard and too obviously:

> There are very few towns that has undergone a more complete transformation in character than Newcastle-upon-Tyne. It is true that "Pandon" still graces the under part of the town with its amphibious charms and muddy fragrance. The sand-hill is yet the emporium of the *piscatory* tribute of the ocean, and the *rendezvous* of the "Cullercoats" ladies, whose *understandings* are of the first class order! The "Side", too, remains in all its ancient glory, being the most *upright* street in Europe. The Castle continues to frown like a hoary-headed cynic upon the surrounding innovations, and the lang stairs yet try the *puff* of many a valetudinarian. Mr. Grainger, up to 1848, had nearly modernized the whole of the upper part of Newcastle; new streets were laid out in all directions, and he designed and built one of the most splendid and capacious market-places in the United Kingdom. The new Corn-Exchange was without a rival; this building has been converted into a Reading-room and a Commercial Exchange. But the railway acted the part of the great magician in its wonderful transformations. The high-level bridge which spans the Tyne, in the novel character of a pair of bridges, is one of the greatest undertakings of the age. (pp. 157-8)

The abrupt change (at Mr Grainger and 1848) from an ornate, flowery, over-mischievous style, to more direct and factual prose (the 'facts' of a complacent city's self-advertisement, the commercial rhetoric of the "puff" in a new sense), with one controlled metaphor, is meant, clearly, to reflect the transformation from a past Eighteenth century town to the modernised nineteenth century city that has overtaken it, but the contrast is too artificial, the early sentences too unsteady in their poise. The first mode is, it seems to me, too close to that which Burn, disinherited, felt obliged to appropriate, for him to parody it.

A final example shows the strains in Burn's style more subtly:

> About the time I am writing of, this village Hightee, or *Hytee*, must have been a regular *rendezvous* for wandering vagabonds. I remember one very ludicrous scene, which was like to have ended in tragedy. Among the swarms of beggars, tinkers and *gipsies*, there was a woman who had been in the neighbourhood for a considerable time. This lady was short of the sense of hearing, or at least she made it convenient to be so. She had successfully

> levied black mail upon certain of the fair sex, under the pretence of telling them what good things the Fates had in store for them. It had come to pass that the oracles of this Sybil were not always in keeping with the truth. Upon the occasion in question, a large number of the villagers of both genders carried the poor deaf and dumb lady to a pond of water which embellished the village green, and, after having bound her body with a horse halter, by way of trying the hydropathic cure, they dragged her body and soul back and forward through the water. Her complaint seemed hopelessly incurable; but, as the good lady was determined not to go to heaven by water, she at last allowed the water to do for her what it undoes in many others, and, when the villagers found that they had rendered the woman such a service as that of restoring her hearing, and, what was of more importance in a female point of view, the use of her tongue, they consigned her to the care of the Procurator Fiscal. I have often seen her after that as deaf and dumb as any fortune-teller could wish to be. (pp. 7-8)

A full critical analysis is presumably unnecessary. It seems clear that Burn is constantly led into ways of expressing himself that are tinged with artificiality, indicating a self-consciousness about writing, a sense that there are 'better' ways of putting what he has to say than the straightforward, almost oral, style that seems latently natural to him; even the name of the village places him in a cultural quandary. This passage and many others (for example, the long description of a journey from Perth to Dunkeld, pp. 146-7) remind one of certain passages in Thomas Hardy, with their somehow apologetic jostling of literary manners.

Other features of Burn's style betray similar tensions. He frequently prefers slightly unexpected alternatives to everyday statements: "Castlereagh had quietly given himself a passport to the other world" (p. 105), "I gave a hostage to the State" (for 'my son was born', p. 116), "keep our jaws in healthy exercise" (p. 90), "flash the sword of his maiden speech in the face of Daniel O'Connell" (p. 127), "hydropathic immersion" (p. 91). His grammatical constructions are often slightly deflected from correct forms, as the various quotations in this study sufficiently indicate. At times his self-consciousness about language takes the form of a weak pun: he describes a pair of clogs as "these wooden understandings" (p. 52) and, after relating how he used padding to give himself extra height as an army recruit, he comments "I dare say I am not the first who has been elevated to the army by fictitious means" (p. 85). His writing is, as a result of these familiar but extensively used stylistic devices, constantly interesting and occasionally even

impressive: the phrase "a young lady, who was then verging into that equivocal age where love lingers between hope and despair" (p. 104) gains much from the grammatically dubious "verging into", while the terse description of Malvern as "one of those delightful places where the dilapidated in health can be washed, dried and mangled at pleasure, and returned to their friends regenerated members of society" (p. 158) is both just and nemorable. Burn can at times handle a kind of Dickensian humour with some success, even in the stock situation of a recruit's fitting-out: "The shoes were so capacious that, with a little enlargement, and a Siamese union, I might have gone on a voyage of discovery in them!" (p. 109), where the phrase "and a Siamese union" considerably sharpens the image (though the exclamation mark dilutes the dead-pan impact). He can also evoke an appropriate response in a passage, too long to quote, recounting stories of the Devil (pp. 11-13). On occasion, of course, he lapses into sheer sentimentality and over-ornateness, as in the opening pages of Letter X (pp. 153-5)) on Edinburgh. A more significantly bad sentence is his comment on the Dublin beggars, who, "in their unmitigated rags, are a unique specimen of the *genus homo*; and amid their mountains of motly rags there is a world of *devil-ma-care*. light-hearted fun and humour, and their ready wit sparkles in exuberance from the fountains of originality" (pp. 113-4). The distance between the cliches of these last phrases (it is difficult to read them as parody) and his earlier description, sharp and precise, of handbarrow beggars as "these dilapidated and crumpled-up fragments of the *genus homo*" (p. 9) tempts one to see Burn as paternalistically distancing himself from his own past in the later passage: the language parallels the hypocritically unfeeling acknowledgement of a carelessly dropped coin from the now respectable commercial traveller.

In this last example the tone and vocabulary of one world are uncritically adopted to the detriment of any felt engagement with the scene described: it is held at length and jocularly pitied. Most of the examples quoted earlier straddle two worlds, employing distinct styles, uneasily fusing two linguistic strands, embodying the tension in Burn's own social position. The juxtapositions seem to me, in many cases, to be conscious and deliberate, with intended aims and often successful effect. Where the degree of deliberateness is problematic, the same tension is nevertheless stylistically present, inescapable. Burn's refusal or incapacity to write in one consistent style is perhaps the linguistic equivalent of his reconciliatory politics, a sense that both sets of implied values can be used on particular occasions; it is certainly a reflection of his continuing isolation, his inability to become a. firmly placed and "respectable member of society".

Burn himself remarks towards the close of his autobiography that "the peculiarities of style is a striking characteristic among authors, and cannot fail to impress us with their varied modes of arranging and classifying their ideas" (pp. 187-8). We have seen how his own style strikes us, and though he claims at one point that it is "above [his] capacity of mind . . to arrange . . the various details" of his experience (p. 180), his mode of "arranging" is in fact interesting. The structure of the autobiography directly communicates one central feature of his life, which, in Burn's view, he shared with his class in general:

> There are a number of circumstances connected with the life of a working man, which people in an independent sphere cannot feel - the smallest accident in the machinery of a family dependent upon labour, is frequently sufficient to turn the current of life from one of comparative happiness to irredeemable misery. (p. 170)

This comment recalls and expands that curious and striking phrase, quoted earlier: "accidental feeders." The accidental character of life pervades the autobiography: Burn is constantly entering upon "new phases" in his existence, taking new turnings, being unexpectedly involved in this or that, falling ill, and losing jobs. He describes himself as having 25/- "to begin the world again with" (p. 81), speaks of minor events as "preludes to change in fortune" (p. 98), refers to his leaving one job as "the second grand crisis of my life" (p. 104), opens Letter VIII by forecasting "an entire new phase of my life" (p. 118) and Letter IX with "I dare say you will wonder in what new phase of existence you will find me next" (p. 135). He remarks of one attempt at establishing his own business that "This little step once more altered the future tenor of my life, and plunged me into a train of circumstances as varied as it is almost possible to imagine" (p. 143) and speaks of his "rapid changes in condition of life and strange transformations in . . social position" (p. 162). He introduces one incident with "I am now about entering upon an entire new career, and the next five years became, perhaps, the most eventful in the whole of my chequered life" (p. 164). He finally acknowledges that such emphasis on "new phases" can be tiresome: "On the 7th January, 1852, I was introduced to another new trade. I dare say you will think by this time that I have been Jack of all professions and master of none. Should you do so, you are not far wrong in the conclusion" (p.174).

Yet Burn insists upon his apprenticeship as the "grand turning point" of his life (p. 198) and, as we have seen, tries to imply that he finally

attained respectability. The sense of life as a journey is at times used almost to reconcile the frequency of "changes" with the attainment of an "end": "I dare say you are getting tired in following me through the mazes of my wayward fate. I think you will agree with me, that my journey thus far has been sufficiently varied, even for the most hungry lover of change. You have, however, still a few more milestones to pass with me, ere I can bring you up to my present position" (p. 172). The metaphor of "milestones" implies a destination, but even "my present position" is precarious, for the passage continues: "Whether I shall now be allowed to finish my journey on the downhill of life free from the toils and vicissitudes of my past career, is a mystery which time alone can solve" (p. 172, end of Letter X).

We can see Burn here trying to achieve a simultaneous sense of chaos and coherence both in his life and in the autobiography, and it is this attempt in the structure of the work as a whole which requires analysis.

Burn was certainly aware of the problem. In the Preface he remarks: "Men in their daily intercourse have frequent opportunities to study each other's history, but as they cannot keep up the connection in the regular order of events, their narratives necessarily become disjointed" (p. v). He insists, however, that his own life has a clear outline, falling into three parts: the first part "will introduce the Author in the character of a wandering vagrant" (p. v), the second part "will show the reader the misdirected energies of an uneducated man" (pp. v-vi), while

> the third epoch of the Author's life may be said to have been ruled by a series of conflicting circumstances, over which he appeared to have had little or no control; however, the reader will not fail to observe that the same laudable determination of character which saved him from moral shipwreck in early life, still enabled him to weather the storms of adversity in more advanced years. On the whole, the narrative will be found to be a series of natural incidents arising out of their various causes, and the Author has made no attempt either to heighten their colour, or enhance their importance. (p. vi)

Despite this sketched outline, however, the pattern of the *Autobiography* itself does not seem to fall in any way into a three-part structure, though Burn throughout the work continues to imply that some pattern will emerge. He opens Letter III, for example:

> The first two chapters in the history of my life can be of very little interest either to you or any body else. Their principal value will be found in their connection with after events. Every man's life is

> made up of a chain of causes, some of which produce direct or immediate effects, others would seem to act upon us in remote periods of our existence, and exercise an influence over our very destinies. I am not a fatalist - at least, I think not - yet I have often found myself led and acted upon by feelings and influences which I could not account for by any little philosophy I possessed. This short-sightedness may arise occasionally from attributing certain acts and circumstances in our lives to proximate rather than to distant causes, or vice versa. As you proceed with this narrative, you will observe that my life has been one of epochs, or, more properly speaking, I have been carried forward by a succession of trade-winds without any directing power of my own. (p. 36)

The technique of the first sentence here is repeated in less extended form later: "I know you cannot find much interest in this matter, nor would I have noticed it, if it had not been for the after consequences" (p. 131). In fact, the immediate "after consequences" on this occasion are of no more "real interest" than the first "matter", but the impression is given (in both examples) that there is some important continuity and connection: the comment indeed substitutes itself for an actual analysis of cause and effect. A similar technique is at work in his comment on losing his tavern business: "But this was one of my seeming misfortunes, which I now look upon as one of the most fortunate events in my life; and I think you will agree with me in the expression, when you know of my improved condition" (p. 152). This implies that the loss of the tavern prepared the way for prosperity; in fact, the later opportunity arose by chance, after a great many other jobs, one lasting a year (p. 162), another a total disaster (p. 164), another a continual struggle (p. 170f).

These attempts to affirm dubious connections are part of the pattern of constantly highlighting incidents as "new" corners in life, which gives the impression, temporarily, of reaching an important plateau on which the journey will now be smoother; invariably, however, the reader's expectations are frustrated. In particular, the highlighting of Burn's apprenticeship as the "grand turning point" gives it a significance that the rest of the autobiography does not support. Immediately before recounting his apprenticeship, almost exactly half-way through the autobiography, Burn provides a personal resume, emphasising that "Up to this period I had been the slave of circumstance" and that "my life was frequently upon the turning point, when the merest accident would have made me a vagabond without redemption" (p. 102).

It is true that he is never again a beggar, but the crucial factor is more his becoming an adult: both before and after this point he works as a labourer and in other casual employment, and is still very much (as the

Preface states) subject to chance circumstances. Moreover, his life during the apprenticeship itself turned out to be "just as unvaried and monotonous as that of any ploughman" (p. 107). The final summary of his life (pp. 197-200) rests, in fact, partly on the reader suspending his recollection of the fortuitous shifts of the second half of the autobiography and partly on his believing Burn's claim to have finally achieved respectability - a claim that the concealed facts barely sustain (cf. section iv above). The various summaries and the highlighting techniques do help to convey some sense of control in the chaos, but the main device for achieving both reactions from the reader has so far been mentioned only in passing: the casting of the whole autobiography in an epistolatory form. It is this method of "arrangement" that perhaps ma.rks Burn's *Autobiography* as of more than marginal interest.

The *Autobiography* is made up of thirteen chapters headed "Letter I" to "Letter XIII". Letter I is datelined "Aberdeen, September 20th, 1854"; VI has "Alloa, November", X is headed "Edinburgh" and XII and XIII "London, August 24th, 1855" and "London, September, 1855" respectively; the other Letters have no place or date attached. Each Letter opens with "My dear Thomas", and a vocative "you" style is frequently used, but there is no final salutation or signature to any Letter. The effect of this epistolatory structure is important. It allows Burn regular opportunities, in the opening paragraphs of Letters (e.g. IV, VI, IX, Xl), for reflective comments, even miniature essays, which help to impose a sense of coherence: three of the quotations above (from pp. 180, 36, 152) illustrating his connecting techniques, come from the openings or endings of Letters. That the Letters are written to his son has its own side-effects. The realisation that "Thomas" is Burn's own child is delayed until over half-way into the autobiography (the absence of final salutations helps to ensure this), and then comes, casually (p. 108), immediately after Burn's account of how, inexplicably, he "hated" his own father "as if he had been my most deadly enemy" (p. 107); that account is suddenly given an unexpected resonance. With his son as recipient. Burn can also avoid one central problem for autobiographers: rather than end the autobiography with presentiments of approaching death, or offer explanations for concluding at a particular stage in life. Burn is justified in taking the story of his life only up to the point where his now adult son needs no further information, knowing whatever remains or is to come as someone personally acquainted with Burn.

But the letter-form has a further and more important effect on the autobiography, and particularly its opening and ending. In opening the *Autobiography* and reading the dateline on the first Letter, the reader is immediately located at a specific time and place, "Aberdeen, September

20th, 1854." The effect of this is curious: we read the account of early beggar-life and wanderings as if from a static position; we are at rest and so too, the notion of letter-writing implies, is the author. Both reader and author are deliberately distanced from involvement in the content by the form; we read and he writes from a clearly stable and retrospective standpoint. The absence of datelines on Letters II to V inclusive and VII to IX inclusive with an intervening dateline ("Alloa, November") on Letter VI has a more latent effect: the sense of stability is initially carried over, but in the heading to Letter VI it is indicated that these Letters, too, are written on a journey - a journey in time and space, from Aberdeen in September (Letter I) to Edinburgh (Letter X) via Alloa in November; that journey is to be completed in London (Letters XII, XIIl) in exactly one year (Letter I, September 1854; Letter XIII, September 1855). The time-scale of the form is leisurely (a year for 500 miles), contrasting both with the rapidity, frequency and length of journeys related in the content (cf. above, pp. 126f.) and with the time-span of the work, a whole lifetime. How far the interaction between these two time-scales is deliberately intended is perhaps difficult to decide (though the otherwise erratic presence of datelines requires some explanation), but one further effect of the epistolatory structure does seem deliberately arranged.

In Letter XI, we read the following: "In September 1854 I travelled. from Newton-stewart to Dumfries. This was within a few months of forty years after my runaway exploit" in the same area (p. 176). We suddenly realise that the journey mentioned here - a journey undertaken for his employer in his finally "respectable" post - is presumably the first part of that journey on which Letter I was written, itself recounting Burn's early life in the area broadly covered by the later journey.

This recognition leaves the reader with a sense of strands finally gathered up: the past and the present are not merely compared (cf. p. 175: "many opportunities of comparing the past with the present state of things") but curiously fused. The particular choice of dates and places, and the overlapping of the two journeys, encloses the end of the "journey" of Burn's life in its beginning and the beginning in the ostensible end, insinuating a sense of completedness, of conclusion. The struggle to extract order from accidental chaos is, almost, achieved and the structure of the autobiography, as it finally falls into place, parallels and enacts the achievement of that central aim of Burn's actual life: the attainment of a "resting place", of stability within movement.

vii : aspects of the historical context

Some of the aspects of style and structure in. Burn's *Autobiography* that

we have so far examined have been linked, fairly loosely, to some characteristics of his personal and political background. But the attempt to so arrange his life-story that it insinuates a simultaneously static and changing pattern invites further analysis, and suggests a wider context in which we can read the 1855 *Autobiography*.

Burn's own repeated emphasis on his apprenticeship as a hatter provides a starting point. The title of 'Journeyman Hatter' has a double resonance, of both time and distance, for the hatters are among the first group of workers for whom we have evidence of a 'tramping' system: in the 1770s unemployed hatters tramped from town to town in search of work and were reasonably assured of 'relief' from their fellow-hatters;' in 1777 hatters' petitions against a proposed Bill to lift restrictions on apprenticeship asserted that 'except at brisk times many hundreds are obliged to go travelling up and down the kingdom in search of employ'. As early as the 1730s, the hatters had houses of call, though they did not adopt the 'blank' or chit system for relief till 1798. The hatters even designed their union emblem to portray tramping. The purpose of the tramping system was, clearly, to provide a form of unemployment benefit: a journeyman on the road, looking for work, would, in effect, receive unemployment benefit from his colleagues. Such an organised circuit of 'houses of call' for accredited 'strangers' rested upon an organised 'combination' or union of workers, and the hatters were, again, among the first groups of workers to form a trade union, while conversely the system of tramping itself helped to found union branches. Hatters, moreover, at least as individuals, seem to have been consistently present in most of the early attempts at political or 'general union' organisation: a master hatter served on the committee of the London Corresponding Society in the 1790s; in 1813, a Halifax hatter was among- those tried for Luddism before the Special Committee at York; in 1818 the Newcastle hatters sent contributions to Manchester strikers and in the same year Lancashire hatters were represented at the meeting which founded the 'Philanthropic Society' or 'General Union of Trades'; the National Association for the Protection of Labour in 1830-31 had at least ten hatters' branches contributing to it.

Burn's travels in search of work, it should be noted, were no more extensive than those of a tramping artisan, but more specifically we can recall that he served as a hatters' delegate to Trade Union meetings and on radical committees (pp. 124, 128) and that the tavern he owned for a time in the late 1830s was called 'The Hatters' Arms' - as were most of the public-houses used as houses of call by tramping hatters (p. 136). By the time he wrote the *Autobiography* in 1855, however, 'tramping' was undergoing a general and significant change. The

unemployment of the 1830s and particularly the 1840s was, for some trades, a national rather than local phenomenon, and 'tramping' was therefore an inappropriate protection. Increasingly, static out-of-work pay began to be introduced instead, first by local branches - for example, the London branch of the Steam-Engine Makers as early as 1836 - then as national union policy, the Steam-Engine Makers and the Ironfounders both introducing 'donative payments' nationally in 1851. Other trades followed suit during the 1860s and early 1870s. By 1878 George Howell could describe the tramping system as obsolescent.

The historical and economic reasons for the decline in tramping are complex, but there was also a latent structural fragility in the system: a balance had to be maintained in a Union between those members 'on tramp' and static branch members; clearly, not all members could be simultaneously 'on tramp', though a national depression could logically demand that situation if no alternative relief was available - indeed, in the depression of the 1870s some trades regularly issued tramp-cards to 10% or even 25% of their members every year. From the 1850s the problem of unemployment relief began to be met in other ways, partly by static relief and partly by the traditional but now, in some unions, officially encouraged and subsidised solution of emigration, an international tramp. Encouragement of emigration is often regarded as a mark of 'New Model Unionism', and certainly static relief was practised by the classic 'New Model', the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, from its foundation in 1851.

The notion of a widespread 'New Model Unionism', from 1850 onward, has of course been strongly challenged and the traditional picture has been modified by recent research, but in Burn's own case many of the elements of the traditional version of 'New Model Unionism' are explicitly present. In *A Glimpse at the Social Condition of the Working Classes during the Early Part of the Present Century* (c. 1867) which is further entitled *Trade Strikes and their consequences to the people who may be immediately connected with them. with reflections upon trades' unions and their management*. Burn argues for emigration, aided by Trade Unions, in preference to strikes (G., p. 148) and supports Councils of Conciliation in trade disputes (C., pp. 75,142). He apparently goes against the 'New Model' attitude on one major issue: "I do not say that the industrial classes should ignore politics altogether, but I am of opinion that the less they have to do with political matters the better it will be for themselves" (G., p. 143) - a position that the 'Junta' would not have accepted in those terms, but insofar as Burn is referring to the mode of 'politics' associated with Chartism, his position is perhaps only the extreme version of a mood of conciliation and moderate reformism often attributed to the 'New Model'. Like Applegarth

before the Royal Commission, Burn emphasises the overlap between Trade Unions and Friendly Societies (G., ch. II) and castigates the 'Sheffield Outrages' (G., p. 77f). He also quotes the Preface to the *Handbook of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers* (G., pp. 102-4). His position on the Nine Hours Bill marks him as 'non-militant' even in Trade Union affairs: he opposed the Bill on the grounds that increased leisure would lead to drink and that shorter hours would involve a reduction in wages (G., p. 58) - though the latter point might have been endorsed by some contemporary Trade Union officials.

The consonance between Burn's views and those of the 'New Model' section of Trade Unionism (whatever the historical size or importance of that section) is based, I would suggest, upon shared premisses or problems, a common problematic. When the *Operative Bricklayers' Society's Trade Circular*, under the control of Coulson, a member of the 'Junta', argued on December 1st, 1861, that even strikes might be used as a form of political pressure, that 'The machinery of trade-unions might be turned to raise millions of men in social position and thereby lay for centuries of years the foundation of national freedom and power", the means may have dismayed Burn but the formulation of the objective would, I suspect, have met with his approval. For the aim of "rais[ing] millions of men in social position" is, as we shall see, an ambivalent objective. The article went on to argue that the vote had to be sought "purely as a measure for the advancement of the respectable working classes in their social position, and as a guarantee for their industrial rights and privileges." This emphasis is echoed by a Reform League pamphlet, *To the Trades Unionists of the United Kingdom*, issued in 1865: 'Let us once be able to maintain by the force of intellect and truth our rights as workmen in that House, and depend upon it we shall rise in the social scale.'

In 1867 Ludlow and Lloyd Jones, the Christian Socialist allies of the 'Junta', saw Co-operative Societies as already having the same effect, raising nearly 150,000 of the working classes

> collectively, if not individually, by this means alone, into the position hitherto occupied by the shopkeeping class . . . Thousands of working men in these various establishments [co-operative production units] are learning to enter into the position and to share the interests of the employer class.

A year later George Howell, Secretary of the Reform League and Coulson's colleague in both the Bricklayers' Society and the 'Junta', outlined the political equivalent of this attitude:

> I have never been, and never shall be, an advocate for merely changing our masters. I want neither aristocratic rule, nor the rule of the middle classes, nor the rule of the working classes. I want a government of the entire people.

Burn himself can supply the economic parallel: in the *Autobiography* (1855) he argues that it "matters very little whether the riches be held by one class or another, inasmuch as there will always be a select few who will possess great wealth" (p. 184). These various formulations parallel, or perhaps complement, each other not in their details but in a premiss which seems to underlay them all: that millions of people, the 'respectable' working classes or even the whole working class, can be 'raised' in the social order and yet that the social order will somehow remain, in a curious way, intact. Though the explicit hope is reserved for a more or less elastic group of 'respectable' workers, the logical assumption behind such a hope, as a strategy, is that everybody could eventually become a shopkeeper, an employer, a ruler, or - as in the quotation from Bum - that "riches" and other forms of social power could be attached to "one class or another" without changing the nature of that class as a class; in such a strategy, it is not recognised that 'class' is a relationship, such that to abolish one term of the relationship is to abolish the other.

The hope implicit in that strategy is, indeed, similar to the hope that everybody in a Union could be simultaneously 'on tramp' and yet receiving benefit from the 'other' members, the non-existent static branch members. Put more theoretically, the metaphor of 'raising' implies a model of society as simultaneously static and moving; this is, of course, possible in absolute economic terms (a general raising of the standard of living from which all groups equally benefit) but for everyone to be raised socially *vis-a-vis* other groups is logically impossible, nor is it possible for a whole class (as distinct from an individual) to be 'raised' relative to the class 'above' it without a considerable change in the structure of the whole society. It was, as we have seen, in the form or structure of his autobiography that Burn faced a similar problem and, by sleight of pen, 'solved' it, presenting his own life as simultaneously static and moving, but in terms of a whole society no such solution is possible though that way of posing the problem and the hope of a similar solution seems to have been what united the 'Junta' and their allies in the 1850s to 1870s.

We can, briefly, note other related aspects of the political, social and economic problems of those decades. The cooperation of Christian Socialists with the 'Junta' highlights one development in the period: a renewed attempt at an alliance between middle-class and working-class

reformers. In the early 1850s, after the 'collapse' of Chartism, Hume, Sturge, O'Connor, O'Brien, Lloyd Jones, Bright and others were involved in various attempts at class collaboration, in the 'Little Charter', the revived 'Complete Suffrage Movement' group, the National Reform League, the Parliamentary and Financial Reform League, etc. In the late 1850s and throughout the 1860s strong links were formed between some middle-class reformers and some working-class groups in the campaigns leading up to the 1867 Reform Act. The alliance tended to be with the 'labour aristocracy' (the term will have to serve here) while the Parliamentary debates and the drafting committee manoeuvres during' the 1866 and 1867 sessions often revolved round the problem of drawing' lines between the 'labour aristocracy' or 'respectable' working class and the somewhat less respectable working class, in terms of franchise qualifications - though Disraeli was prepared to gamble on the less 'respectable' proving to be the more conservative voters. One issue in the debates over the Reform Bills was the 'lodger franchise': Gladstone's Bill in 1866 included £10 lodgers, but an amendment excluded them; Disraeli's 1867 Bill at first excluded lodgers but later included £10 lodgers with twelve months' residence; at one stage Stanley was even asked to speak for the Government on the lodger clause without any guidance as to whether to speak for or against. Beales, as President of the Reform League, saw 'household suffrage in combination with the lodger franchise [as] all but equivalent to what the advocates of residential and registered manhood suffrage require,' while George Potter, leader of the London Working Men's Association, insisted on 'either household suffrage with a lodger franchise or else a week's cessation from labour aiming at a complete stop being put to all traffic and all business.' The lodger franchise was problematic because it involved not only questions of technical definition but also that deep prejudice against people without a permanent home and address which in part underlies the characteristic conservative equation of political responsibility with personal property. It connects at this level with another problem which was emerging to middle-class consciousness from the 1860s: the presence of 'casual labour' - which increasingly included Burn's own trade of hat-making - in London and elsewhere. For by an ignorance of the structural determinants of casual labour and by a sliding equation of 'casual' with 'poor' with 'dangerous', the middle-class tried to 'solve' the 'problem' of casual labour in London partly by an emphasis on re-housing: to give the working class permanent homes was somehow seen as encouraging them to have permanent jobs. Again, the equation - this time in economic terms - was made between 'respectability' or 'responsibility' and having a fixed

location, a home address.

These brief pointers perhaps indicate a further context in which Burn's political and linguistic hovering between middle-class and working-class values can be seen, and also suggest both a concrete and an ideological underpinning to his emphasis on finding - after all his journeyings and multiple 'casual' jobs, after his slow climb from the 'dangerous class' of beggar to the dubiously respectable position of debt-collector - a permanent 'resting place' in which he could finally be recognised as a "respectable member of society".

viii : literary strands

Burn's work can be placed not only within a particular historical context but also in relation to certain literary traditions and problems. That he was himself aware of a literary context for his own work is indicated at various points in his writings. In the penultimate Letter of the *Autobiography* he comments:

> In my mind, a book is the living depository of the author's feelings and sentiments upon the subject of which he writes; and whether he writes for pay or pleasure, he must leave honest traces of his thoughts upon its pages, whether he will or not . . through the medium of his own style. The peculiarities of style is a striking characteristic among authors, and cannot fail to impress us with their varied modes of arranging and classifying their ideas. It is in this strange condition of the human mind, when acted upon by different temperaments, that men's idiosyncracies are made patent to the world. (pp. 187-8)

To illustrate that any author is "sure to clothe the subject with the peculiar tints of his own mind" (p. 188), Burn offers some brief literary critical analyses of passages from Cobbett, Burns, Pore, Byron and others (pp. 188-9). While he acknowledges that poets "are an exception to the rest of men: the construction of their minds and all their modes of thinking are peculiarly their own" (p. 189), he also notes:

> It has frequently been asked, What is poetry? My opinion is, that it is merely a truthful picture of nature, wherein the objects are arranged and garnished according to the fancy of the artist (p. 191)

and argues that the

> best criterion of measured verse is the power it exercises over our feelings; and this is the simple secret that makes the humblest members of society as good judges of true poetry as the most learned savants.(p. 192)

Given this interest in poetry and awareness of the "idiosyncracies" revealed by style, one could suggest that Burn's own style is at times a conscious imitation of the facetiously periphrastic and argot elements found in, for example, Byron. Burn's use of slang in the passage describing the "two young gentlemen in their regular *cadging* trade" (cf. above) can be compared with Byron's use of thieves' jargon in *Don Juan* (Canto XI, stanza xix):

> He from the world had cut off a great man,
> Who in his time had made heroic bustle.
> Who in a row like Tom could lead the van,
> Booze in the ken, or at the spellken hustle?
> Who queer a flat? Who (spite of Bow-street's ban)
> On the high toby-spice so flash the muzzle?
> Who on a lark, with black-eyed Sal (his blowing),
> So prime, so swell, so nutty, and so knowing?

This semi-facetious use of slang, of course, was not uncommon in poetry throughout the century - Henley's *London Types* (1898) includes some late examples - and is also found in the popular fictional reportage of the London and underworld scene in, for example, Pierce Egan's *Life in Londo*n (1821) and his many imitators.

Egan's adventures of Tom and Jerry had a more sober successor in the 'travels' through London and the industrial North of middle-class novelists and social investigators, who often presented themselves as 'explorers' in an alien country. Burn adopts something of this role in his "guided tours" of London, Sheffield, Glasgow and Dublin in his *Commercial Enter*prise.(1858). His title for that work echoes another genre of 'travel book' popular in the late 1840s and 1850s: the literature of the 'Commercial Traveller'. In, for example, Throne Crick's *Sketches from the Diary of a Commercial Traveller* (1847) or The *Road: Leaves from the Sketch-Book of a Commercial Traveller* (1872) by 'The Whistling Commercial', the life of the commercial traveller was presented, often humorously, as a model of individual enterprise within the new industrial order. Burn may indeed have felt that his own work as a debt-collector was a variant of commercial travelling. Samuel Smiles partly adopted the 'Commercial' model in his reluctant biography of George Moore (1878) while Dickens contributed his own

version of the genre in *The Uncommercial Traveller* (1861,1863). Dickens's uncommercial traveller is mainly a semi-satirical variant on the 'explorer' role, but Smiles tried, despite his dislike of Moore, to produce yet another biography that could act as a model.

Burn's autobiography can also be seen as a contribution to the 'biography of success' genre typified by Smiles' work. As J. F. C. Harrison points out, 'Potted biography was the staple of the greater part of the literature of success [and] a useful quarry was found in the autobiographies of working-class leaders such as Samuel Bamford, Alexander Somerville, and Thomas Cooper.' Burn's general attitudes and recommendations parallel those of Smiles - for example, in his emphasis on "character" in 1855 and his attacks on "selfishness" in the 1860s but perhaps more significantly his basic aim in the *Autobiography* has parallels with Smiles and, indirectly, with certain themes in Dickens. The metaphor of "resting place" and the search for a "home" is, of course, shared with Smiles and Dickens: both emphasise the ethos of "the home", Smiles for example at length in the chapter on 'Healthy Homes' in *Thrift* (1875, ch. xv). But Burn's aim is more often expressed as the desire to become "respectable", through the "energy and determination of his character" (pp. v, 199). In later works, however, he expressed some unease at the notion of the self-made man. He emphasised often that in America the "leading merchants and manufacturers are transformed working-men" (TY., p. 174), that in England the Woolsack was occupied by a man "of plebeian origin" (TY., p. 271), that Peel was the grandson of a working man (TY., p. 271), that the leaders of commerce have risen from the "ranks" (CE., p. 191); yet he also comments that the "worst class of manufacturers we know of are some of those who have immediately risen out of the labour ranks" (CE., p. 99), and even argues against workers becoming employers (CE., pp. 100-101). The want of "those kindly feelings that regulate the conduct of the higher classes of employers" which he found in self-made men (CE., p. 99) is seen as characterising American society as a whole:

> The want of consideration for men's feelings and sentiments is one of the leading traits in the American character, This I look upon as a consequence arising out of the system of equality which reduces every man to the level of every other man. (TY., p. 12)

Moreover, even in 1855, Burn emphasised - in a way that Smiles refused to do - the elements of failure in his life (e.g., pp. 145, 149, 150, 164).

In 1855, the same year as Burn's *Autobiography*, Dickens began *Little*

Dorrit (1855-57) in which he takes as his hero a middle-aged failure, Arthur Clenham, and presents in the inventor Daniel Doyce an 'honest, self-helpful, indefatigable old man who has worked his way all through his life.' Clenham introduces himself with the comment: 'I am such a waif and stray everywhere, that I am liable to be drifted where any current may set . . I have no will.' Which recalls not only Burn's self-description as "a wandering vagrant" (p. v) and his semi-orphan status, but also his constant use of water-imagery of a similar kind - for example;

> Whatever we may think of our free-will, there can be no doubt, but we are often impelled forward in our careers by a directing power over which we have no control, and such seems to have been my case in this instance. I was therefore carried headlong into a stream of contending circumstances, and like a chip of wood amid the boisterous wave of a stormy sea, I was dashed hither and thither without any controlling power of my own. (p. 165)

Dickens's emphasis on passivity in *Little Dorr it*, even in the case of Doyce, is one indication of a change in his values which the novel as a whole reinforces. Earlier novels, for example *Oliver Twist* (1837-8) and *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-9), had employed a plot in which a 'genteel' hero (whether by birth or character) first descended into the social or economic depths and finally re-emerged as a truly restored or revealed a 'gentleman'. After *Little Dorrit*. an apparently similar plot in *Great Expectation*s (1860 -1) in fact undermines the convention, for Pip has no initial gentility and deliberately sets out to acquire that status, only to find in the end that his social position as 'gentleman' rests on the generosity of a convict. The complexity of Dickens's treatment of the themes of 'self-help' and 'gentleman' cannot be traced here, but the change sketched above indicates that neither notion was for him unproblematic. Nor, indeed, was the slogan of 'Self-Help' entirely clear for Smiles himself, as his later self-defence and insistence that it meant more than material advancement shows; that he originally conceived the notion in the context of working-class communal, rather than individual, self-help efforts in Leeds radical circles may perhaps have contributed to this ambiguity. Burn's uneasiness about the actual "respectability" of his position in 1855 and his later criticisms of some self-made men perhaps show a similar awareness of the problematic nature of self-help, even as a personal strategy. However, his use of the interaction between epistolatory datelines and the chronology of his career (cf. section vi above) parallels Dickens's early and more

confident use of circular plot: whereas Nickleby and Twist both begin as 'gentlemen' yet only have their 'true' status ratified at the end of the novel, Bum, as the "letter-writer" of "September 20th, 1854", "begins" as the "respectable" traveller which the end of the autobiography asserts him to be; the content of the rest of his life intervenes as a. descent into the depths from which he has, all the time, already emerged.

The epistolatory structure also allows Burn, from that achieved "resting place", to offer quite explicit advice, of a Smilesian kind, to his son and to others (cf. e.g. pp. 135f, 180-3, 199). The Preface states that the work was written to encourage young men to overcome their early position in life (p. v) and the final Letter (XIII, p. 197) opens:

> I think a cursory *resumé* may enable you to seize hold of the salient points in my character, whereby you may take advantage of the lessons it is calculated to impress upon the mind of the thoughtful.

This use of published 'Letters', fictional or otherwise, to give advice was, of course, a common feature of the period - for example, the model letters given in the many manuals on letter-writing were almost invariably used to convey improving moral suggestions, and the device had behind it a minor tradition, of which the Earl of Chesterfield's posthumously published *Letters to His Son* was a popular example from the late eighteenth century. But there was also an earlier connection between autobiography and advice in letters: at the end of the seventeenth century and in the early part of the eighteenth century, it has been argued, periodicals often included both genuine and invented 'Letters to the Editor' recounting a decisive event in the writer's life which then served as a pretext for editorial advice to readers on morals and behaviour. Such 'Letters to the Editor' seem to have had some influence on the rise of the epistolatory novel, which often, as Burn does in the *Autobiography*, deliberately utilized the interaction between the narrator's present and the narrated past. The epistolatory novel sometimes hovered, moreover, on the boundaries between fact and fiction, as autobiography often does. Burn relates in the 1882 *Autobiography* (pp. 402-3) how his own 1855 version was sometimes regarded as fictitious, and remarks that he did not mind whether it was read as fact or otherwise. The early epistolatory novel has also been described as 'dramatic' because of its dialogue structure and the relative absence of a detached omniscient narrator; in Burn's case we have perhaps that more typical nineteenth century form, the 'dramatic monologue' by an involved narrator.

John Stuart Mill once remarked that 'there is a very .great

significance in letter-writing . . it differs from daily intercourse as the dramatic differs from the epic or narrative'; Mill had in mind the sense of a 'series of detached scenes, taken at considerable intervals from one another, showing the completed change of position or feeling, without the process by which it was effected.' In a curious way his comment does partly apply to Burn's epistolatory *Autobiography* since the 'completed change of position' at the end is, in effect, asserted 'without the process by which it was effected' being fully revealed. Burn himself uses the word "dramas" of Walter Scott's novels, but then argues that since they portray "real human beings, acting, feeling and conversing in accordance with the times and circumstances that surrounded them" Scott therefore "had the honour of making a new discovery in the boundless field of literature, by making fiction subservient to history" (p. 192). It is here that Burn's emphasis finally falls in his own case. He says that

> Historical books may be fairly placed at the top of all other sources of human knowledge; in this class we have the true character of man in all the phases and conditions of his existence (p. 195)

and he clearly regarded his own autobiography as a contribution to that knowledge, perhaps even higher in kind than normal history-writing as well as literature, since he later argued that the historian's account is inadequate by comparison with personal memory (CE., pp. 133-4). In 1855 he was more cautious; the *Autobiography* opens with. the acknowledgement: "As a general rule, I take it for granted that the life of a mere working man can be of very little interest to the public" (p. 1) - a rule to which, he modestly implies, he will prove an exception. The 1882 *Autobiography* more confidently opens with the assertion that "the histories of lives become valuable contributions to the literature of [the] country" (1882., p. l).

That claim can hardly be insisted upon for Burn's own efforts, but the purpose of this section has been to show that his *Autobiography* of 1855 is a minor but nevertheless interesting example of the appropriation of a fairly wide variety of themes and genres in the literature of the mid-Victorian period, and that Burn, in however unsophisticated a fashion, was partly conscious of that appropriation, For a "beggar boy" that perhaps is no mean achievement.

ix : conclusion

A concluding note can be added. In 1882 Burn published a revised

version of his autobiography, to which reference has occasionally been made. It is basically the 1855 version plus a continuation, of approximately the same length, dealing with further fortuitous changes in his later life: his period in America, followed by clerical work, publishing, some journalism, etc. The emphasis on trying to achieve respectability, on the "dream" of "acceptance" (1882., p. 392), is even more marked than in 1855 (cf. 1882., pp. 392, 426, 441, 446, 447) and this is perhaps reinforced by some judicious omissions from the part retained from 1855 - for example, his attacks on the pre-1832 "good old self-willed Tories" (cf. above). Burn finally, indeed, received a grant from the Royal Literary Fund. (1882., pp. 428-9) and became a "member of the Gentleman's Club" (1882, p. 443). There is, sadly, very little trace in the 1882 edition of the interesting features of the 1855 version, perhaps because Burn no longer felt so acutely the ambivalence of his position. He is, as we have seen, quite open in 1882 about the identity of William Hill; the style of the added chapters lacks almost entirely the earlier juxtaposition of disparate vocabularies and is only rarely marked by a striking phrase; there is very little organisation in this latter half and it seems to have been written not at one time but in sections during the last forty years of his life (cf. e.g. 1882., pp. 373, 399, 438). Most importantly, the epistolatory structure is entirely abandoned and the division into Letters and the vocative form are erased from the whole work, including the sections retained from the 1855 version. This is, one presumes, partly because his son, Thomas, the supposed recipient of the 1855 letters, had died in the meanwhile - there is a moving chapter (XXVI) recounting the deaths of his son and his paralysed, mentally ill wife, and recalling the earlier losses of a dozen children. But other children were still alive, and the main reason for the absence of the 1855 structure is, surely, that its effect in 1855 was no longer needed, or desired, by 1882: the context had changed too much; the age of fragile equipoise had gone.

One new feature of the 1882 volume is, however, of some interest, and has been briefly mentioned earlier. The work includes a long 'Supplement' entitled *Glimpses of English social, commercial and political history during the eighty years. 1802-1882*. This is almost entirely composed of histories of mundane objects - buttons, needles, envelopes, bicycles, tinned food, etc. (1882., pp. 510-590). In this fascination with the world about him and the detailed knowledge of its every aspect that Burn is concerned to demonstrate, we perhaps see emerging in a new form the old urge: to find a secure place in a society in which he could, at last, feel at home - yet the very attempt simultaneously reveals the extent to which he had still not, quite, succeeded. Though he "never lost caste" (1882., p. 447), Burn remained "one of the outside links in

the chain of civilised society" (1855., p. 95); somehow he seems to have been always, like many of his class, only "a stranger in what should have been a home" (1855., p. 82).

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Chapter 4 : Thomas Frost
'talking by turns of politics and poetry'

i) A Chartist and something- more

ii) Communes and poetry

iii) The entire fabric of society

iv) Class and totalisation

v) 1848 as anti-climax

vi) Inconclusions and rationality

vii) Newspapers and known communities

viii) Conclusion

Unless otherwise specified, page references are to:
Rc : *Forty Years' Recollections: Literary and Political,* 1880. Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington, London.
Rm : *Reminiscences of a Country Journalist* 1886. Ward & Downey, London.
See the Primary Bibliography for details of other texts by Frost.

Thomas Frost begins the second chapter of his *Forty Years Recollections* (1880) with the statement:

> Forty years ago the minds of vast numbers of the thinking portion of the working classes throughout the most highly-civilized countries of the world were filled with ideas of the perfectibility of human nature and the reconstruction of society upon the basis of universal liberty, equality and fraternity. (Rc, p. 13)

Frost himself, as one of those who "embraced with ardour the theories of moral and social regeneration which were at that time in the course of active promulgation" (Rc, p. 13), was attracted first to "the Owenite Socialist movement", at a meeting of the South London Twenties at Tivoli Gardens, Norwood, when he was sixteen (Rc, p. 14). At first, he comments, "the scheme of the philosopher" of New Lanark "interested me chiefly in its metaphysical aspect" (Rc, pp. 14-15), but as he "became impressed with the connexion between the influence of circumstances in the formation of character and the new organisation which Owen desired to give society" (Rc, p. 15), he began to recognise that "Socialism, as expounded by Owen, seemed to present a perfectly practicable solution of a problem which had been for some time working in my mind, namely, how the progress of the physical sciences and mechanical arts could be made most conducive to the happiness and well-being of the people" (Rc, p. 15). But "In those days no small amount of moral courage was required in the man who avowed himself a Socialist" (Rc, p. 15), for "if a Chartist was suspected of designs tending to the wholesale infraction of the eighth commandment, a Socialist was held in horror as certainly capable of violating the entire decalogue." (Rc, p. 16). Put in rather more positive terms, Owenism was recognised as offering a far more total perspective, in the late 1830s, than Chartism, proposing not just "the Six Points" but, indeed,"ideas of the reconstruction of society and the perfectionation of human nature" (Rc, p. 26). Frost recognises quite explicitly that he was then "a 'Chartist, and. something more', as the advanced reformers of that day were wont to describe themselves" in the sense that "as yet I, with many more, occupied towards Chartism the position which the professors of that political creed held towards the Corn Law repealers. We believed the demand for the Charter to be a just one, but the goal of our aspirations was far beyond it, and we were unwilling to waste our strength in agitating for anything less than the reconstruction of the entire fabric of society" (Rc, pp. 38-39).

With this perspective, he "did not at that time connect [him] self with the Chartist organisation" (Rc, p. 38).

Frost is here speaking of 1839, and by that time a slightly earlier generation had already become dissatisfied, not with the perspective but with the approach, of Owenism. Francis Place, describing the Sunday morning lectures of the London Working Men's Association in 1836-37, remarked 'Nearly all the men who attended these discussions had been Owenites, but had abandoned it in consequence of their being unable to see any practical result'. By 1847, after various intervening experiments (cf. below), Frost had "become convinced ... that social ameliorations of every kind must make slow progress until the masses acquired political power", and when a branch of the National Land Company was founded in Croydon, followed by the "re-formation of a branch of the Charter Association", Frost joined both, "being elected a member of the [local] committee, in which capacity [he] became a member of the general council of the Association" (Rc, p. 96). But by 1847 he was also a "member of the Association of Fraternal Democrats, meeting monthly at a dingy public-house in Drury Lane" (Rc, p. 125). The Association, in Frost's description, "was composed of democratic refugees from most parts of Europe, but chiefly of Frenchman [*sic*], Germans, and Poles, with a sprinkling of such advanced reformers of this country as, like Julian Harney and Ernest Jones, were 'Chartists, and something more'."

The Fraternal Democrats have been recognised by historians of Chartism as the 'extreme' wing of Chartism at this period. Frost was one of that "sprinkling of . . advanced reformers of this country"; every member of the Fraternal Democrats "was required to be proposed by a member, whose nomination had to be backed by another, proposer and seconder being held responsible for the soundness of the aspirant's democratic views, and the correctness of his moral conduct" (Rc, pp. 125-6). The soundness of the aspirant's views was judged against the of 'Principles and Rules', which announced that members 'renounce, repudiate and condemn all political hereditary inequalities and distinctions of ', and declare that 'Governments elected by and responsible to, the entire people is our political creed', that 'the earth with all its natural productions is the common property of all' and that the society's 'moral creed is to receive our fellow men, without regard to country, as members of one family, the human race; and citizens of one great commonwealth - the world'. That Frost's allegiance to these principles was firm is attested by his claim to have "been received into the Fraternal Democrats on the nomination of Julian Harney, seconded by Henry Ross", since Harney was the most prominent founder-member of the Fraternal

Democrats and Ross was one of the "dominant local leaders in London in the 1840s", one of the local organisers whose work, it has been argued, was more important, in London Chartism, than either the LWMA or the FD as formally organised groupings. What is significant about Frost's membership of the Fraternal Democrats is not only that he was thereby in touch with many of the leading Chartists (four of the five-man Chartist Executive in 1847 were FD members: McGrath, Clarke, Doyle, Wheeler) and with many continental socialists - for in fact he does not seem to have been a regular attender at FD meetings; what is important is that at this stage Frost is still, though in a different sense, "a Chartist and something more": his perspectives are still broad, international, total, indeed Utopian. Though in terms of practical politics Frost, like many, broke with the 'extreme wing' in 1848 and reconciled himself to a more 'reformist' position (cf. below), it is the initial urge towards a total position that seems to give the clue to the significance of his wide-ranging activities and writings, including his autobiographical writings, of later years.

ii : communes and poetry

The pattern is given in microcosm in. the way he recounts his early involvements, prior to his Chartist and Fraternal Democrats phase: at sixteen his interest in Owenism had its original source in literature:

> I had just been reading Coleridge's 'Religious Musings', and the brief address in which the philosopher of New Lanark had set forth the principles of his new constitution of society sent me to the poem again. The scheme of the philosopher seemed to be the due response to the aspirations of the poet. At that time, however, it interested me chiefly in its metaphysical aspect. It was not until after I read the grand and wondrous poems of Shelley, two or three years later, that my mind became impressed with the' connexion between the influence of circumstances in the formation of character and the new organisation which Owen desired to give society. (Rc, pp. 14-15)

It is this pattern, of moving from literature to politics and back "to the poem again", that is reproduced both within the *Recollections* and in Frost's actual life. The next chapter in the *Recollection*s (ch III) describes how Frost first met the local Chartists, in the figure of Jem Blackaby, who "might have been the prototype of Alton Locke, for he was a poet as well as a politician" (Rc, p. 34) and who reminded Frost of Bloomfield and Gifford. In this chapter, therefore. Frost is "talking by

turns of politics and poetry" (Rc, p. 34), the chapter opening with an account of the clash between Cobden and Blackaby at Croydon, in which Blackaby demonstrated how Chartism included and went beyond the demands of the Anti-Corn Law League (Rc, pp. 27-32), followed by Frost's description of Blackaby as both debater on Owenism and poet (Rc, pp. 32-35) and then a summary of Chartist activity in 1839-42 (Rc, pp. 35-38), the chapter ending with the conclusion : "The poetry of Coleridge and Shelley was stirring within me, and making me 'a Chartist, and something more'" (Rc, p. 38; cf. above, p. 175).

The next chapter (IV) is concerned with Frost's own practical attempts to go beyond the perspective of Chartism, first in seeking membership of the Alcott House Concordium, then in trying to establish his own semi-Owenite commune (Rc, pp. 40-52). Chapter V relates how Frost tried to found a journal "which should serve as a record of progress for all" the various "schools and sects of social reformers . . without being the special organ of any one of them" (Rc, p. 53); this project (Utopian in itself!) to provide a single forum replacing "the *New Age* . of the Concordists, the *Communist Chronicle* of the Communist Church, the *Model Republic* of the Charter-Socialists, the *Rising Sun* of the Etzlerites, and the *Progress of the Truth as it is in Jesus* of the White Friends" finally involved Frost simply in financing the profitless extension of James Goodwyn Barmby's *Communist Chronicle*, until Barmby and Frost separated, on the two issues of religious allegiance and paternalism, each continuing a journal briefly. Frost the *Communist Journal* and Barmby the *Communist Chronicle* . In its short life the joint *Communist Chronicle* had included a series of "Studies on St.-Simon, Fourier and Owen" and a 'romance' by Barmby entitled 'The Book of Platonopolis', which certainly ranks among extreme Utopian visions of the period ; it was summarised by Frost as

> a vision of the future, a dream of the rehabilitation of the earth and of humanity; of Communisteries built of marble and porphyry, in which the commoners dine off gold and silver plate, in banqueting-halls furnished with luxurious couches, adorned with the most exquisite productions of the painter and sculptor, and enlivened with music; where steam-cars convey them from one place to another as often as they desire a change of residence, or, if they wish to vary the mode of travelling, balloons and aerial ships are ready to transport them through the air; where, in short, all that has been imagined by Plato, More, Bacon, and Campanella, is reproduced, and combined with all that modern science has effected or essayed for lessening human toil or promoting human

enjoyment. (Rc, p. 61)

Such an extreme vision was bound to fade. This chapter concludes on a sobering note: "Communism died out in England very rapidly" (Rc, p. 75). Frost explains:

> The Co-operative movement . . drew into it all the more practical and less imaginative of the thousands over whose minds Communism had for a time exercised a potent charm. The comparative prosperity resulting from the development of free trade converted those whom Communism attracted only by the glowing prospect of material amelioration which it offered, and who formed the residuum of the movement. (Rc, p. 76)

On the other hand:

> The fewer thinkers and dreamers retained their faith in Utopia perhaps, but they abandoned the distinctive characteristics of their respective sects and schools, ceased to expect the realisation of their day-dreams of the future in the present century, and directed their powers to the accomplishment of more practicable, and therefore more immediately useful reforms, if less lofty in aim, than the regeneration of humanity and the reconstruction of the social fabric.(Rc, p. 76)

This, deliberately echoing in its last phrase the closing phrases of the assertion of the Charter "and something more", two chapters earlier (Rc, p. 38, cf. above), seems like an acknowledgement of Frost's lowered sights. But the next words, at the head of the following chapter (VI) are "Popular Literature Forty Years Ago" and the chapter is concerned with the history of literature-for "the masses", including Frost's first contributions of serial fiction. By the juxtaposition of these chapters Frost is, in effect, asserting that he is to be numbered rather among the "thinkers and dreamers", the more rather than the less "imaginative", those still seeing the Utopia; but, as the juxtaposition also underlines, if the practical realisation of Utopia is to be acknowledged as extremely distant, then recourse can be had back "to the poem again". It is this pattern, evident in the arrangement and contents of chapters III to VI of *Recollections*. that, transposed in certain ways, we can now examine in Frost's life and writings as a whole.

It is the emphasis on 'entire' that is the starting point. Just as the Chartists went beyond the single-issue campaign of the Anti-Corn Law League, so Frost's positions, as Owenite, Concordist and Fraternal Democrat, attempt to include not just a single issue or "the Six Points" but every aspect of "the social fabric". To an impressive extent Frost's own life reflects this urge: his interests, concerns, involvements, connections, seem at some point, in some way, to have touched almost every significant aspect of his age. A mere listing, by reducing and abstracting, and ignoring the shadings of involvement, is unsatisfactory, but at least demonstrates the range of Frost's antennae.

We have already noted his father's Radicalism in 1832, Frost's contact with the now-obscure London scene of communes, physical puritans, even "Swedenborgians, Millenarians, Southcottians, White Quakers, and the like" (Rc, p. 59), his correspondence with Owen (Rc, p. 22), his "connexion with the Chartist movement as a member of the General Council, and with the National Land Company as a local office-holder" (Rc, p. 169), and the beginnings of his popular writing. Additions can be made in each area - politics and literature - and in new areas. At the age of eighteen he sent a "treatise on the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Episcopal Church, bristling with arguments, deistical and necessitarian, against every point of the Church's belief" (Rm, p. 39) to Henry Hetherington, ex-editor of the *Poor Man's Guardian*. then (1840) in prison for publishing Haslam's "Letters to the Clergy". Hetherington declined the treatise on the grounds that "nobody cares anything about the Thirty-Nine Articles"; in February of the following year, of course, John Henry Newman published *Tract XC, Remarks on Certain Passages of the Thirty-Nine Articles*. Frost later re-established contact with Hetherington, as publisher of the *Communist Chronicle* (Rc, p. 60) and a fellow-Chartist. He also flirted more than once in later life with religious questions of the day: his first appearance in print was a short article in *The Freethinkers' Information for the People*, which "anticipated the hypotheses which subsequently produced so much sensation in the anonymously-published *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*" (Rm, p. 40). By the early 1850s, about the time of the collapse of the Parliamentary Reform Association of Hume and Walmsley (cf. Rc, pp. 209-10), Frost was criticising scripture-readers in industrial towns for their incompetence "to remove the doubts or meet the arguments of the many intelligent men to be found in large towns who might reject the Bible as a divine revelation" (Rc, pp. 210-11) and he soon "made an application for employment to the Church of England Scripture Readers' Association, backing it with the

required testimonials" (Rc, p. 213). Eventually refused by that Association, he re-applied to the Towns Mission Society (Rc, p. 222), which also declined his application. However, he persisted and "occupied [his] leisure in amateur mission work among the wretched inhabitants of squalid and poverty-stricken Bethnal Green, and assisting the curate of St. Phillip's in teaching the ragged urchins who attended his Sunday-school" (Rc, p. 223). Frost speculates that his Chartist-Socialist background influenced the interview board of the Scripture Readers' Association and quotes the suspicious hostility of one minister at any attempt to fuse socialism and Christianity; again Frost is paddling in an important current in Victorian history: the same year, 1853, F. D. Maurice was deprived of his Professorship at King's College for publishing his *Theological Essays* and in 1854 Maurice helped to found the London Working Men's College, perhaps the most enduring effect of Christian Socialism. By the 1870s we find Frost producing a number of stories for the Religious Tract Society (Rm, pp. 215ff.) - though he declined a proposal to edit an "original chronological history of the Holy Bible" designed to prove that "the creation . . was the work of SIX DAYS such as we know days to be, A.M. 1, B.C. 10,000."

This pattern of shifting interest in religious matters links to other avenues Frost explored. It was his "own observations on the development of the most simple forms of vegetable and animal life" (Rm, p. 39) that prompted the "anticipation" of Chambers' *Vestiges*; the habit of observation of nature seems to have been constant with Frost: about 1876 (cf. Rm, pp. 243-247) he moved to Southborough, about two miles north of Tunbridge Wells, where he quickly "made considerable additions to a series of descriptive sketches, interspersed with notices of bird and insect life, which I had commenced in Surrey" (Rm, p. 248). These sketches were soon published, as three volumes "respectively relating to the neighbourhoods of Croydon, Kingston-upon-Thames, and Tunbridge Wells" (Rm, p. 249), in a series of *Half-Holiday Hand-Books* and. Frost comments, "have commanded a steady summer sale ever since" (Rm, p. 249).

Frost is here, again, touching some important elements in the Victorian age: the beginnings of the "problem of leisure" for a majority, added to a variant on the amateur naturalist craze. But the ease with which Frost wrote the books and found a publisher, in contrast to his early writing ventures, is indicative of his experience by the 1870s in the field of popular writing. He had begun his working life as an apprentice in a printing office (Rm, p. 38), and had quickly suggested to his employer, Cornelius Chapman, the publication of a local magazine, the first number of which appeared, as *Chapman's*

Miscellany, in February 1843. The four numbers published included poetry and translations from Schiller and Uhland by Chapman, a travel narrative by a Dr. Bemey, and, from Frost himself, "an archaeological article gleaned from an old history of the town, and a story of the fifteenth century, with the attraction of local associations" and "two . . somewhat longer stories" (Rm, pp. 42-3). Frost graduated from this to work as a printer for William Dugdale, a bookseller who sold Sue, Voltaire, Carlile and other "comparatively unobjectionable" works, but also "a species of literature which has been termed 'Satanic' and which the fitful efforts of the Society for the Suppression of Vice, aided by Lord Campbell's Act, have failed to extinguish" - i.e. "guinea books of erotic engravings, imported from Paris". (Rm, pp. 53-4) After only a fortnight at Dugdale's, Frost returned to Croydon and set up his own press, first publishing a couple of his own pamphlets (on cosmogony and on Owenism) and then a local *Penny Punc*h, under his own editorship. About the same time he made his "first appearance as a newspaper correspondent in. the columns of *Lloyd's London Newspape*r" (Rm, p. 57). His subsequent activities in journalism and popular literature were numerous. He began with anonymous 'penny number' serial fiction, modelled on Sue (Rm, p. 66), then made some early attempts at writing drama (Rm, p. 68), which were eventually rewarded indirectly when his first story for *Boys of England* was dramatised (Rm, p. 181). After this mediated success he tried again in his own right as a dramatist (Rm, pp. 182f.) but despite his experience by then of "converting popular dramas into short stories for Purkess's 'Library of Romance'" (Rm, p. 100) he had no success in converting his "story .. written in 1852 for the *National Instructor*" into an acceptable drama. Frost's connection with the *National Instructor* had almost fortuitous roots: after writing penny number fiction for a time, including one story (*The Mysteries of Old Father Thames*) which was also dramatised, Frost concluded that "this class of literature was being superseded by the *London Journal* and *Reynolds's Miscellany*" (Rm, p. 75), and tried for work as a hack writer, agreeing first to "compile a work on the plan of Hone's 'Every Day Book'" and then a novel (Rm, p. 77). Both these projects were discontinued, owing to complicated financial difficulties of the publisher, and Frost's novel was sold, in manuscript, to another publisher - who happened to be Macgowan, the printer of O'Connor's *Northern Star*. Macgowan had just started publishing the *Commonwealth*. a radical sixpenny magazine, when Frost sent him a story about the Bethnal Green poor, which was accepted. The *Commonwealth* failed, but served to introduce Frost to George Fleming, ex-editor of the Owenite *New Moral World* and just then starting the *National Instruct*or. Frost's serial story for the *National Instructor* led him to enrolment on the staff

of *Chambers's Papers for the People*, in 1850. He contributed a number of papers, on "Social Utopias", "The Secret Societies of the Middle Ages", "Ancient Philosophic Sects" and "Ancient Rites and Mysteries" (cf. Rm, p. 81). Frost's experience on the *National Instructo*r and *Chambers's Paper*s left him confident enough to 'run' "four stories at the same time, three in numbers, and one in a periodical" (Rm, pp. 83-4); he began to sell most of his serial stories before writing more than a dozen episodes, and even turned down an exclusive contract with Edward Lloyd (Rm, p. 83).

Much of Frost's writing was clearly hack-writing, such as his "Black Register" (a "series of narratives of remarkable crimes"), his writing of short stories to 'fit' a set of redundant engravings, and his ghost-writing activities for various people (Rm, pp. 92, 93, 128f.). But a more disinterested motive lay behind some of his fiction: he claims that "when a man is able to express his views on politics, and on political and social economy, in a manner which obtains him thousands of admiring readers, - as I had done in fiction, - the confession of his political opponents that they consider him dangerous is the highest compliment they can pay him" (Rm, p. 73). In fact Frost, at Macgowan's request, even completed a half-written novel of the best exponent of this tactic among the Radical Chartists: Ernest Jones's *The Lass and the Lady,* published in 1855.

Jones himself, from (by that time) a more 'extreme' political position than Frost's, formulated other links between politics and writing that Frost exemplified. In 1852 Jones wrote that

> It is clear . . that if education is to be safe, the people must become their own educators - and we therefore draw the attention of our readers to the important requisite: a literature for the young. Our democratic literature is all written for the adult - we must have a literature written expressly for the child of the working man. And since the class-books of the rich are the exponents of class-government, ours must be the exponents of popular sovereignity.

Whether Frost grasped the point this clearly is doubtful, but he certainly figured fairly prominently in the production of "a literature for the young".

His first story for *Boys of England* was in 1869, and by 1871 he had written "about a dozen serial stories" for that and other publications owned by Brett (Rm, p. 191). Brett's *Boys of Engl*and, begun in 1866, was the most successful of the mid-century 'new brand' of boys' periodicals, and it certainly did not cater for the taste of middle-class

Victorian parents. Frost was recognised as sufficiently successful in this field to be asked to edit the *Gentleman's Journal*, an attempt to enter the battle between Brett and his main rival W. L. Emmett (Rm, pp. 203f.). Frost's boys' stories for the Religious Tract Society, in which "care [had to be] taken to combine the incidents with a healthy moral tone, and to make them subservient to the teaching of the Gospel" (Rm, p. 216), would probably have horrified Ernest Jones, but the RTS were pleased enough to recall Frost as a contributor to their new *Boys' Own Paper* in 1879: W. H. Hutcheson wrote to Frost in October 1878 asking "Can you help us? Already the names of some of the best known and most honoured writers of the age have been secured, and we hope to start with good promise" (Rm, p. 259). In fact one of Frost's stories, 'Wrecked on a Floe', appeared in the very first number. But the first actual editor, J.M. Macaulay, declined further stories from Frost, suggesting instead that he should contribute "a narrative of personal travel or adventure abroad". Whatever Macaulay's opinion of Frost's stories, Frost certainly claimed to have known most of the major "masculine purveyors of imaginative reading to the millions" (Rm, p. 180): Stagg, Stevens, Suter, and Percy and Vane St. John.

Frost had known Percy St. John fifteen years earlier, during Frost's first full editorship, of Cassell's *Magazine of Art*. Another member of Cassell's staff at that time, E. B. Neill, provided Frost with his next job: Neill was then the London correspondent of the *Birmingham Journal* and of the *Liverpool Albion*; he asked Frost for a hack-article on emigration to Canada, and the result was Frost's engagement "to write the leaders of the *Birmingham Journal*. and to report Select Committees and Royal Commissions, and furnish resumes of Parliamentary papers, both for the *Birmingham Daily Post* and the *Liverpool Daily Post*". (Rm, p. 119.) Here, though again from a different political position, Frost is practising a link that Jones insisted upon: between the press and politics. During the General Election of 1847 Frost had written letters on Parliamentary reform for the *South-Eastern Gazette* (Rm, p. 73); about 1850, he claims, he suggested to Macgowan a *Halfpenny Herald*. aiming at a sale of 200,000. But his first professional 'political' journalism was "for the *Birmingham Daily Post*" (*sic*; cf. above), reporting the Small Arms Select Committee, a few months before becoming editor of the *Magazine of Art* (Rm, p. 106). Frost wrote for the *Birmingham Journal* till about 1859, then began to write leaders for the *Liverpool Albion* on foreign politics and social questions (Rm, p. 120); on one occasion he 'scooped' a meeting on the mismanagement of the Crimean War for the *Albion* (Rm, p. 289). The *Albion* was less liberal than the *Birmingham Journal* (cf. Rm, p. 133) and Frost found his radicalism being muted.

While writing for the *Albion* Frost also began writing "the leaders and leaderettes" for the *Shrewsbury Chronicle* (Rm, p. 132); he wrote for that paper till 1872, when the increasing costs of paper and compositors' wages forced general economies in the newspaper world (cf. Rm, p. 209). The same year the *Albion* changed hands and Frost found both the new political line of the paper and the new terms of contract objectionable (Rm, p. 210). The *Gentleman's Journal*, which Frost was then editing, also closed that year. An earlier draft of the *Reminiscences*. written before 1875 and quoted by Frost himself (Rm, pp. 211-12), included a paragraph beginning: "I have not written a line for any newspaper since. Probably I shall never write another" and goes on to explain that

> It is a grand thing to aid in forming the opinions of the people, or to direct the organ of a popular movement, and give an impulse to humanity that will be felt through many generations. But there are few journalists who are so happily placed as to be able to pursue the independent course which alone can make the position satisfactory to an honourable and conscientious man. Most of them have to regulate the views which they express by the Procrustean standard established by their employers, so as to further the aims of some small section of the community. My eighteen years' experience of journalism do not inspire me with any very ardent longing to continue them.

Despite this. Frost did continue with his career as a journalist. In 1875 his mother died, he returned to Croydon, and soon contributed a series of 'Recollections of an Old Croydonian' to the local *Croydon Chronicle*; between 1876 and 1880 he wrote "several serial stories for a Sheffield newspaper" (Rm, p. 249), probably the *Sheffield Evening Post*. founded in 1873. In 1881 Frost was offered the sub-editorship of the Sheffield paper (Rm, ch XXIII), and in January 1882 moved to the sub-editorship of the *Barnsley Times*; in October 1882 he moved again, to the sub-editorship of the *Liverpool Evening Albion* (Rm, p. 308). All these sub-editorships were in practice editorships, and Frost found himself, in Sheffield and Barnsley, in conflict with Conservative proprietors over editorial policy (cf. Rm, ch XXVI). In Liverpool a merger between the *Albion* and the *Liverpool Telephone* brought that editorship to a close and shortly afterwards Frost returned to Barnsley as editor of the *Barnsley Independent,* the *Barnsley Times* under a new title (Rm, p. 314). Despite the avowed non-partisan character of the 'new' paper, after the 1885 General Election it reverted to its old Conservative bias and Frost again found himself an unemployed

journalist. In these later posts Frost clearly recognised that he was being forced to compromise on his political principles (cf. e.g. Rm, p. 288), and in his struggle to steer between multiple political positions during the 1885 Election a microcosm of English politics at that moment is present (.cf. Rm, ch. XXVI. Perhaps the most significant contribution Frost made in terms of nineteenth century journalism was his articles in the *Birmingham Journal* and *Post* advocating the extension of the franchise as an early part of the Birmingham-based campaign leading up to the 1867 Reform Act. As in other fields. Frost often gives the impression of an intimate knowledge of the whole world of newspaper proprietors, editors and journalists (cf. e.g. Rm, pp. 120-126).

Frost's more directly political activities will be considered below, but again they exhibit the same wide-ranging acquaintanceship. To conclude this survey of his concerns and interests, some further points at which he touched important Victorian strands can be mentioned. He once planned a book "on the origin of man and the migrations of the race in prehistoric times, in which [he] proposed to reconcile the existence of several distinct varieties of the genus *homo* with the hypothesis of a common origin by means of a theory of development" (Rm, pp. 9-80) and another book on the Italian revolution (Rm, p. 79); during the same job-less period he gave a lecture on the Californian gold rush (Rm, p. 78). He was for a short time a Life Insurance agent among the working class (Rm, p. 94). He wrote articles in the *Albion* on military strategy which, he claims, anticipated those in an article in the *United Service Magazine* (Dec. 1870) on the disadvantages of fortresses in modern warfare, engaged in a debate (in the *Albion*) with Admiral Sir Howard Douglas on the use of rockets, and finally wrote a lengthy article for the *United Service Magazine* which paralleled von Moltke's strategic innovations (Rm, pp. 189-91). An article by Frost in *Et Cetera* propounded the theory, later verified by Stanley's explorations, that the Lullaby was not the Nile but the Congo river (Rm, p. 201). 18,000 copies of his *Half-Hours with the Early Explorers* were sold, catering for the taste for naval exploits, as did many of his short stories (Rm, p. 217). The Indian Mutiny prompted Frost immediately to edit a *Complete Narrative of the Indian Mutiny* (1857). He contributed to the Dickensian industry with his In *Kent with Charles Dickens* (1880) and was among the first historians of 'popular culture', in his *Circus Life and Circus Celebrities* (1875), *The Old Showmen and the Old London Fairs* (1874.) and *The Lives of the Conjurors* (1876).

The significant point about this impressive range of interests, involvements and activities, is not that they are internally coherent, linked as a group of connected strands by any immediate association, but that they are connected together only insofar as the history and society of the period through which Frost lived was a 'totality'. Frost seems to have been alive to almost every facet of life in his period, to have tried to encompass in his own life as many currents of ideas and activities as he could. This, it seems to me, is linked to his initial 'Utopian' standpoint: his concern was, throughout, with the "*entire* social fabric".

There are other ways in which this attempt to grasp the whole society is apparent in Frost. The society was constituted on a class-basis, yet with each of the main class-groupings Frost was, in different ways, in contact. He was directly involved with the 'working classes' in a number of ways: with the skilled artisans prominent in the general Chartist movement, with that branch of Chartism, the 'Harney tradition' from the London Democratic Association to the Fraternal Democrats, which concentrated more on the 'lumpen-proletariat' with the totally poor of Bethnal Green, and with the varieties of popular entertainers that catered for and frequently came from, the poorer sections of the working-class. His contact with the 'middle-classes' was less direct: he joined the Parliamentary Reform Association of the middle-class reformers and wrote for their more prominent provincial newspapers. Even the older aristocracy was explored by Frost, though at a more mediated distance: his *Life of Thomas Lord Lyttelton* (1876) shows a close acquaintanceship with the political world of the aristocracy towards the end of the eighteenth century.

Frost's personal 'class-position' was ambivalent: his father was a tailor, earning enough by retirement to own "an orchard and a garden, a couple of pigs, and a score of poultry", which "to him seemed the summit of felicity" (Rm, p. 55); his parents were apparently not poor enough to have had to break into a sum of £25 ("the accumulated gifts and bequests of earlier years") part of which Frost obtained from his mother to begin his printing business (Rm, p. 56). When his mother died in 1875, three years after his father, "a small estate at Upper Norwood . . became divisible between [his] two sisters and [him] self", but on recounting this Frost is quick to comment: "Lest my readers should suppose that this event placed me in a position to live at ease, free from the cares and anxieties which attend those who are not born 'with a silver spoon on their mouth', I had better state at once that my share of the income from this property is about sixty pounds per year"

(Rm, p. 243). In 1850 a fee of "15 guineas per Paper", for his contributions to Chambers's *Papers for the People*, was a "golden shower" (Rm, p. 81), and his financial position throughout his life seems to have been insecure: it is typical to find him writing "I was living upon the surplus earnings of the previous year, eked out with the proceeds of an occasional magazine article and the interest of a small investment in Turkish bonds" (Rm, p. 214). Perhaps the Turkish bonds indicate, however, a contrary semi-definition. Certainly Frost's education was unusually prolonged for any 'working class' boy at that time: till the age of ten he was educated by an elder sister (Rm, p. 225) then went for four years to a day-school "kept by a gentleman named Westwood, at Hollingbourne House" (Rm, p. 38); Frost also mentions, casually, in *In Kent with Charles Dickens* (p. 172): "About fifteen years ago, I had my abode, for a time, on the second floor of an old house in one of those Westminster streets in which many of the aristocracy once had their town residences, and which still retain an air of faded gentility", and the anecdote incidentally mentions his servant-girl (p. 173). It is fairly clear from these references that Frost hovered between the class-lines, partly perhaps because of his (main) profession as a journalist, but the relevant class-boundaries were certainly at the lower end.

One can also note that Frost shows signs of embracing as many facets of the period as possible in the claims he makes for influences upon him, and in the auto-didactic urge he exhibits in his writings: the sources he traces for his books on popular entertainment are impressively varied and even esoteric. Yet the resulting books, like his life, seem as much a miscellaneous jumble as an ordered whole. It is, in fact, peculiarly appropriate that Frost should have become by the end of his life primarily a newspaper editor, for the task of an editor is, daily, to assemble large amounts of miscellaneous news and information, concerning every aspect of the contemporary world, and yet present the result as, in some sense, a cohesive whole. Frost himself comments on the miscellaneous nature of his knowledge, precisely as an asset to his journalistic career:

> One qualification of no little importance in reporting which I possessed at this early period of my journalistic career was the great amount of miscellaneous knowledge which I had gathered in the course of my varied reading and occupations, and which an excellent memory had enabled me to retain. I soon found that, whatever might be the subject before any Parliamentary committee which I had to report, I knew enough about it to discriminate readily between what was important in the evidence and that which was trivial or irrelevant. (Rm, p. 109)

But the move from assimilation to discrimination involves options, which may be disputed: at an. early stage, an. incident, involving a clash with a witness before a Select Committee, convinced Frost of this fact, and of course the experience of squabbling over or trying to reconcile political policies with proprietors underlined the point. For the society he was reporting could not be grasped as a coherent totality: newspapers necessarily offered divergent interpretations. An attempt to make completely consistent sense of every aspect of the social and political world was bound to fail.

So too was Frost's attempt in his own life. In a split society only a split life is possible; an attempt to live a, totally embracing life can only be seen as a series of fragmented lives. Frost frequently recognised this of his own life:

> In the instance of the humble individual who presents this transcript of his past life . . whatever interest the record may have for his readers may be supposed to be enhanced by the circumstance that . . the literary labours of his later years have differed so widely in character as to evoke from the critics some amusing speculations as to his position and pursuits. While one has conjectured that the writer must have been in. the habit, throughout his life, of travelling from one fair to another, associating with clowns and acrobats, another has surmised that he is a veteran revolutionist who has kept himself dark, and that his associates in the past have been the foreign refugees who haunt the cafes around Leicester Square. How near these conflicting ideas are to the truth will appear in the following pages. (Rm, Preface, p. vi)

> One of my reviewers [of *The Old Showmen*] surmised that I had been all my life in the habit of wandering from one fair to another . . When *The Secret Societies of the European Revolution* was published, the *Times*, in a lengthy review of the book, hinted that I was a modem Guy Fawkes; so that, as I have since been more correctly described in the *Athenaeum.* and other journals, the reviewers have, among them, made of me, as Mrs. Malaprop says in the comedy, 'three gentlemen rolled into one.' (Rm, pp. 223-24)

> Here was one of their own townsmen, whose name had become known in the literary world, and whose works had been criticised in the reviews and the newspapers, living in their midst, and they knew it not, never thought of associating with the authorship of

> books which bore his name on the title-page the man with whose form and face they had been familiar on public platforms, and in the business life of the town thirty years before. (Rm, p. 247)
>
> The third man was the present writer, who looks like - it is hard to say what, for he was once erroneously supposed to be a retired acrobat, and on another occasion was mistaken for a Wesleyan minister.

Frost, one feels, could only have achieved his complete and rounded self in a quite different society, the society he pictured to himself in his youth, reconstructed "upon the basis of universal liberty, equality, and fraternity" (Rc, p. 13), and tried at first to realise on a small scale in his projected commune. But, in the real world, of nineteenth century England, such a project was defeated, unfinished, necessarily anti-climactic. Here it is not important simply that the project failed, but also the precise way in which, for Frost, in his experience, the political project crumbled and the Utopian dream receded.

v : 1848 as anti-climax

Two chapters, VIII and IX, in the *Recollection*s tell the tale, and their construction is symptomatic. Ch VIII opens (literally) with "The revival of the Chartist movement in Croydon . ." and Frost's first personal involvement (Rc, pp. 118-120). Frost then comments on the misleading report of the inaugural Croydon meeting in the *South-Eastern Gazette* and compares it with the "full and accurate report" in the *Northern Star* (Re, pp. 120-21). The narrative is then interrupted, in what seems a curious digression but which actually parallels Frost's earlier oscillation (in ch III, cf. above) between "politics and poetry", by a three-page reminiscence of Blackaby: memories of an evening in 1844 when, in idyllic surroundings, he had met Blackaby again after a gap of a year, and a brief account of Blackaby's poetry, including a poem on "the night-flowering cereus", a "strange and beautiful cactus", "the flowers of which unfold their petals at night, and perish before sunrise" (Rc, p. 123). The original thread is picked up again in a paragraph that links the Chartist agitation with the contemporary movement in France led by Odillon-Barrot and describes how the Republican secret societies are preparing "to take advantage of the expected collision with the Government" (Rc, p. 124). Frost remarks that he had prophesied the French revolution of 1848 "before the close of 1847", and then recounts his membership of the Fraternal Democrats, and the FD meeting at which "Suddenly the news of the

events in Paris was brought in. The effect was electrical" (Rc, p. 129). From that meeting, and the wild street demonstration that followed, Frost hurried back to Croydon, "the first person to announce . . the event" there. The Croydon branch organised a meeting to further the Petition and the next few pages present Frost in the role of negotiator with the town authorities (Rc, pp. 130-133). A digression concerning forged signatures to the immense Petition then leads up to the Kennington Common demonstration on 10th April, 1848, with Frost before-hand refuting grim predictions of an armed battle. The tension of the account heightens till the supposed arrest of O'Connor proves to be a meeting for a compromise arrangement between the Chartist leader and the police. Frost himself "breathed more freely" when the compromise was announced (Rc, p. 138), but then the tension in the narrative slowly builds up again, as police and crowd jostle at Blackfriars Bridge:

> Blackfriars Road . . was thronged with people, so densely packed that they could scarcely move, owing to the refusal of the police to allow more than two or three at a time to pass through their ranks. Altercations and fights ensued, ending with the more irascible of the crowd being removed in custody, and were followed by rushes at the police, who beat back the crowd with their truncheons. The exasperation increased as time wore on, and as the crowd became more dense, the pressure upon those in front produced a forward movement which the police were unable to resist. They began to yield ground; the crowd pressed onward, the ranks of the police became broken, and, with a tremendous shout, the dense mass surged over the bridge, sweeping the police before it.
>
> My way lay in the opposite direction. ..(Rc, pp. 140-141)^

The anti-climax leads smoothly into an almost symbolic encounter:

> Threading my way through the scattered and scattering groups, I entered the White Swan, on the southern side of the common, to refresh myself with a glass of ale. There, at the crowded bar, stood Blackaby. (Rc, p. 141)

The evening in the pub in 1844 thus re-enacted, Frost again reminiscences about half-hours later spent in the shoemaker-poet's garret, and the chapter ends, with apparent inconsequence, with Frost's memory of "a sensational incident" on one of his visits to Blackaby. He offers the incident as "a ghastly illustration of the

'juxtaposition' - to use a word which he [Blackaby] much affected - of life and death . ." On a visit to Blackaby's lodgings, Frost suddenly found himself "brought up sharp by a black coffin, standing upon the second-floor landing, at right angles to the dirty, uncarpeted stairs". The final sentence of this chapter, which traces the rise and fall of Chartism as a mass movement is:

> To reach Blackaby's room, I had to step over the coffin, which contained the corpse of a lodger, who had wound up a fortnight's debauch by going' home in the still hours of the night and hanging himself. (Rm, p. 142)

One hardly dare press the parallels, but this seems more than just a fortuitous juxtaposition. One's suspicion, that Frost's arrangement here is more complex than that of mere historical narrative, grows as the account continues.

The next chapter (IX) concentrates on the immediate aftermath of April 10th. It was only then, "when the futility of moral force seemed to be shown", that "an appeal to arms was thought of" (Rc, p. 143). Frost details the "new organisation", comparing it with "the system . . introduced by the secret insurrectionary committee of 1839, which was borrowed from that of the United Irishmen". These "ominous" changes (Rc, p. 144) resulted in the quiet, disciplined march of 80,000 men through London on the night of May 29th, without public notification being necessary. The atmosphere gradually darkens as the chapter proceeds, with details of the stock-piling of small arms, the secret committee, delegates from the Young Ireland movement, attempts at infiltration by police agents, till "On the 9th of June, being again in London, [Frost] called at the office of the Executive Council" (Rc, p. 150). As he left, a stranger

> informed [him], without the least hesitation, that the preparations for insurrection were completed - arms and ammunition provided, missiles collected on the roofs of houses for assailing the military and police while passing through the street, and openings made in party-walls to enable the insurgents to pass from house to house. Whit Monday had been fixed for the rising, which was to be prepared for by the massing of the metropolitan branches at Blackheath and Bishop Bonner's Fields.(Rc, p. 152)

With "only three days . . before the blow would be struck", Frost thought deeply "as the train bore [him] to Croydon that evening":

> But what should I do? That question occurred to my mind again and again. (Rc, p. 153)

Eventually:

> Clear to my mind as the sun at noon to my material vision was the rightfulness of the meditated revolt. (Rc, p. 154)

But this decision meant that, in effect. Frost did nothing: a local Croydon meeting had already been arranged to coincide with the planned demonstrations, to draw off potential police reinforcements from the main London meeting.

Frost did not divulge the further news, to "avoid compromising" his colleagues "in the existing doubtful situation", resolving that "it would be time enough . . to move when a promising movement had been made in London" (Rc, p. 155). Then, on the evening of the 11th, the stranger arrived at Frost's home, to await there the result of the following day, since, as "a member of the revolutionary secret committee" (Rc, p. 156) a warrant had been issued for his arrest. The following pages again present Frost as the negotiator with the local authorities, arguing the case for the legality of the proposed Croydon meeting; the constitutional argument moves rapidly to a threat of force by the Town Council, as five hundred special constables and a hundred and fifty troops move to occupy the site of the planned meeting. Frost returned to the Chartist committee, who condemned the magistrates' action as "arbitrary and unconstitutional" (Rc, p. 160). Then as the time of the meeting approached, small groups of Chartists began to encounter the eighty police placed as the first line of the Town Council's forces. The heavy rain descended in torrents. The tension mounted.

> The courage of my colleagues was now put to the test. On my rising and asking them what they intended to do, there was a dead silence for a few moments, and then a resolution to abandon the meeting, on the ground of the unfavourable weather and the measures adopted by the authorities, was proposed, and was carried by a majority of, I think, five to two. (Rc, p. 160)

For Frost, this was the beginning of his move away from Chartism towards the Parliamentary Reform Association, from one side of the negotiating groups to the other, and the incident must have recalled his earlier choice-point between Chartist and middle-class movements: the meeting of Cobden's Anti-Corn Law League, interrupted by

Blackaby six years earlier:

> The Leaguers had just ascended the waggon which had been drawn up against a corn warehouse to serve as a platform, when the dark clouds which had lowered ominously since noon began to discharge their aqueous contents, and umbrellas went up like a sudden growth of gigantic mushrooms, as well on the waggon as over the heads of the crowd below. A consultation seemed to be held by the Leaguers as to the course to be pursued under these adverse conditions; but there were no symptoms of retreat on the part of the crowd, and the indecision was ended by General Thompson stepping forward, and saying, as he extended one hand towards the throng below, "If it doesn't rain there, it doesn't rain here." Loud applause greeted the remark, and the proceedings were commenced. (Rc, pp. 29-30)^

The bathetic rain in the second incident marked the end, not the beginning, but a few scenes were left to play. That evening Frost and Rose (the "stranger") waited for news from London; at ten o'clock Frost

> . .stepped into the sloppy street; and, leaving the town behind me, ascended an eminence, and looked northward as anxiously as the watchers by the Vistula did on a certain night, half a century ago, when the signal was to be given for the rising in Warsaw. But not one of the conflagrations which Ritchie's corps of "luminaries" were to have kindled reddened the sky. (Rc, p. 161)

The false sunrise never came, and the rest of the chapter explains the failure of both the insurrectionary attempts of that year, on June 12th and August 15th, concluding with the trial of the secret committee and the eventual fate of Mullins, the Home Office spy who had betrayed the revolutionaries. But the chapter does not quite close there: the final paragraph of the chapter returns to Blackaby:

> Blackaby did not live to see the greater part of his political creed made part and parcel of the Constitution on the proposition of a Conservative minister. Failing health induced him to seek the purer air of Northampton, and I never saw him again. Whether he continued to court the Muses, or had all the poetry crushed out of his nature by the severer labour rendered necessary by an inferior description of work, I know not. If he left any manuscripts they have probably been used to light fires, or are stowed away, dusty

> and cobwebby, in some obscure corner of the house in which he died. His strength diminished as his health failed, and with it the means of supporting life unaided; and he succumbed at last to sickness and poverty, and removed to the house of his brother, in the village of Hunsdon, near Ware, to die. (Rc, p. 168)

There is a quiet nobility in this passage; we feel through it the sadness of Frost, but also more than that, for Blackaby has figured, since chapter III, almost as a symbol - of a fusion between poetry and politics and of a hope for the working classes that can no longer, after 1848, be sustained. Frost records, as his feelings during the night of June 12th, "anxiety . . and a degree of disappointment" (Rc, p. 161), a disappointment that turned to a kind of disillusion, for "when the crisis had passed, [he] was so strongly impressed with the conviction that a revolutionary movement was hopeless" (Rc, p. 162), and it is this sense of loss, a loss of Utopian perspectives, as well as the loss of his friend, that we feel as the chapter closes. The "night-flowering cereus . . the flowers of which unfold their petals at night, and perish before sunrise" (cf. above p. 192) and the false sunrise of Ritchie's luminaries hover between the lines of that last paragraph, as it records Blackaby's death before the passing of the second Reform Act – a reform which could only give a faint light in the shadow of previous, lost, hopes.

This chapter is the breaking point: revolution, "the reconstruction of society", "the perfectibility of human nature", never again seemed practicable. A coda (ch X) dealing (severely) with Feargus O'Connor and briefly with Harney and Ernest Jones, bring the movement finally to a close, ending, appropriately, with Jones's death. The final words of these three chapters (VIII, IX, X) are, respectively, "hanging himself", "to die", and "his death"; they seem (deliberately?) apposite. The second movement, slow and sober, opens with *Papers for the People*, Parliamentary Reform and mission work in Bethnal Green (chs. XI, XII, XIII); the chapters then orchestrate these themes, interweaving literature (ch XIV: Cassell; ch XV: provincial journalism; ch XX: popular literature), parliamentary politics (ch XVII: the last years of Palmerston; ch XVIII: the dawn of a new era; ch XXXI: the fall of the Gladstone ministry) and popular semi-political agitation (ch XVI: the Hyde Park riots of 1855; ch XIX: the Hyde Park railings incident of 1867). But the themes are dis-connected from each other, each chapter a separate unit: both the tension and the cohesion of the earlier half are lessened. There is, perhaps inevitably, a sense of anti-climax, of unfinished business, of

lines pursued but never completed, in this second half of the *Recollections*.

vi : inconclusions and rationality

The sense of a premature ending is perhaps inevitable in any autobiography, but the emphasis above on anti-climax, on lack of conclusion, on bathos almost, is given curious support by a puzzling feature of Frost's writings. He frequently inserts anecdotes and stories, sometimes (in *In Kent; with Charles Dicke*ns) fictional stories; and the majority of these do have unsatisfactory, inconclusive endings. A simple example is from the *Reminiscences* (p. 293):

> A fortnight after the adventure just related I visited that village again, and found, on getting into the road, that I had a mile and a half, or more, to walk. It was already dark, and the road was not much lighter where, at a little distance beyond Darton, I saw a red flame casting a flickering glare upon the mud, and on reaching it found that it proceeded from a coal fire in an iron basket, where a colliery tramway crossed the road on the level. A sound as of an approaching train reached my ears, and, on looking in the direction whence it proceeded, I discerned a distant red light. I paused for a moment, but the train seemed to be moving slowly, and I ventured to cross.

Fortuitously, the last words quoted come at the foot of the page; the reader turns the page, expecting to read of a serious accident or at least a narrow escape - to find a new paragraph beginning "I did not go that way again, however", as Frost found a different route more satisfactory. No accident, no escape, not even a further comment - except another anecdote about an awkward short-cut.

Other anecdotes in the same work have similarly inconclusive endings: an extended reminiscence of a cousin who suddenly left home, and whom Frost unexpectedly met again, finally ends with the cousin's return to his wife and Frost's comment "But I never discovered the cause of his mysterious disappearance" (cf. Rm, pp. 43-47). This anecdote is immediately followed by another, concerning a teen-age girl who disappeared from home, with elopement suspected, and was eventually found to have been persuaded by a local fortune-teller to accompany her to India, in the expectation of meeting there a local gentleman who, the fortune-teller had insisted, was secretly in love with the girl (Rm, pp. 47-50). This anecdote is clearly more intelligible - but the idea of going to India is left totally unexplained.

A later anecdote, also about a teen-age girl, is more "mysterious": the girl, in conversation with her guardians, constructs an imaginary local Lord, with whose son she is supposed to be friendly, and persuades her guardians to allow her to spend a night at the Lord's home; when it is discovered that no such Lord exists, the girl leaves home and is not found for a year; Frost is content to say, with apparently genuine puzzlement, that no explanation of this episode was ever forthcoming. A third "missing girl" anecdote occupies six pages (Rm, pp. 144-49) and ends with the predictable solution ("the girl had left for Paris, accompanied by a gentleman") but Frost in fact devotes nearly all his space to a quite false lead he followed up, to the wrong girl. In another anecdote, it is a publisher who cannot be traced, though Frost meets various people who each turn cut to be only a representative of the mysterious publisher, who is never met face-to-face (Rm, pp. 192-200) and this anecdote also manages to embed a page recalling the train incident: Frost *nearly* loses his way in the fog, but doesn't (Rm, pp. 195-6).

A variant on this feature of Frost's characteristic style is the opening of *Reminiscences* ch XIII:

> . . A dark shadow had been cast upon the pathway of my life, and I could not escape from it. It clung to me as relentlessly as the Old Man of the Sea to the shoulders of Sinbad, and I had no power to shake it off. It paralyzed all my efforts for material advancement, and reduced me to the position of a horse in a mill. In some respects the horse had the advantage.
>
> Seven years passed, with the grip of my devilish burden constantly tightening. Desparation at length gave me strength to cast it from me, but the shadow still pursued me, and came at unexpected turns across my path, poisoning my life with the consciousness that we were still breathing the same air.
>
> But this is a riddle, the interpretation of which would not greatly interest my readers, even if I were disposed to open the closet in which my domestic skeleton of those years was concealed. (Rm, pp. 135-36)

I doubt if many readers are "not greatly interest[ed]" after this cryptic statement, but Frost is content to leave it there. This odd contentment would perhaps have been displayed in his "projected work on certain historical puzzles and judicial mysteries" (cf. Rm, p. 213); it is certainly present at times in, for example, his account of some Indian "conjuring tricks" where Frost recounts totally inexplicable incidents and leaves them without attempt at explanation

(cf. e.g. *Lives of the Conjurers*, pp. 208-213, 240f), though at other times Frost clearly takes a sober interest in explaining the mysteries of the conjuring and circus trades. The closest analogue to this strand in Frost is the detective novel, but the detective novel that is sometimes content not to offer a solution.

A clear example of this is Frost's analysis of the evidence for the location of "Dingley Dell", in *In Kent with Charles Dickens*. where, after five pages of close topographical argument, he narrows down the choices, then passes on (pp. 110-114). A similar example is his attempt to check the historical accuracy of "the strange narrative of Ambrose Gwinett", contained in *The Life and Strange Adventures and Voyages, of Ambrose Gwinett*, an "autobiography" which "in the catalogue of the British Museum library, bears the conjectural date of 1731" and is attributed to "Isaac Bickerstaff" - Frost's inquiry ends inconclusively, after nine pages, with "I gave it up" (*In Kent* pp. 214-223). What is odd is the inclusion of such anecdotes and inquiries: the reader seems to be expected to feel an interest in the process, the trail, for its own sake, and not for the sake of any conclusion; in these stories, anti-climax seems to be an accepted virtue.

The parallel with the detective-novel mode is not, entirely, fortuitous: it was in the year after Frost's *Reminiscences* that Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes made his first appearance; the boys' story and the Sue-type well-made thriller had prepared the way; so too, further back, had Godwin and Edgar Allen Poe. Poe died in 1849; by 1924, D. H. Lawrence, in *Studies in Classic American Literature* could remark impatiently: 'These terribly conscious birds, like Poe and his Ligeia, deny the very life that is in them; they want to turn it all into talk, into knowing. And so life, which will not be known, leaves them.' The detective novel is an exercise in rationality, it implies a belief in an ordered world, where cause and effect cohere, clues and solutions are connected, and life can, in the end, be trusted, be made sense of. But against that confidence, a different version of life and the world was being increasingly advanced, whereby the world and the ego itself are questionable, perhaps fragmentary, bundles of experiences and aperçus. Frost, in the early 1880s, shows clear signs of being caught between these two versions: his unfinished anecdotes and lines of inquiry, and his vast quantities of miscellaneous knowledge barely held together and incoherently organised, are deeply part of the same structure of feeling which, after 1850, experienced society, anti-climactically, as unable to be transformed as a whole. It seems that it is in this context that one can best make sense of Frost's autobiographies: it is in the *Recollections* and the *Reminiscences* that he tries to make (his) life into something that can be "known", but no

single work can "hold" his life. He wrote, anti-climactically, two autobiographies, and that he did so is not fortuitous.

vii : newspapers and known communities

Though there is, obviously, a considerable overlap in the contents of the *Recollections* and the *Reminiscences*, what is most striking is the extent to which they are mutually exclusive. A great deal of the *Recollections* is concerned with Frost's various political involvements, yet in the *Reminiscences* politics are scarcely mentioned. Some indicators of his political radicalism remain and occasional echoes of his political activity intrude, but in general any political event or allusion is given only as context or illustration for a quite a-political anecdote. It is symptomatic that the first actual use of the word "politics" in the *Reminiscences* is to mark its exclusion from Frost's local Croydon journal (Rm, p. 42). The mixture of motives in this relative exclusion is given concisely when Frost writes about the *Communist Chronicle*:

> The history of that publication . . has been so fully told in my *Recollections* that it cannot be repeated here, nor would it, perhaps, interest a large proportion of those who will read the present work.

The reason for this expected lack of interest is implicit in the longest single passage devoted to Frost's previous involvement with Chartism: he gives a page and a half to the lives of prominent Fraternal Democrats after 1848 (Rm, pp. 86-7); the passage opens with :

> The political world was quiet. A deep calm had succeeded to the storms of 1848. Men who had then been members of the Executive Council of the Charter Association were now directors of a life assurance company. The brethren of the Fraternal Democrats, with whom I had been associated in 1847-8, were now scattered, some of them dead. (Rm, p. 86)

There is an irony in that juxtaposition of life assurance and death. Only in the context of his difficulties in finding a sufficiently "liberal" newspaper does Frost give any extended treatment of his continuing political options (e.g. Rm, pp. 122, 132, ch XXVI); in relation to his earlier involvements with more extreme political movements, he finally remarks only that

> . . I am not aware that my political antecedents had any influence

> whatever on my career as a journalist, as I believe they were completely unknown, so small had been the part I had played in the arena of politics, until the publication of the *Recollections*. (Rm, p. 268)

Frost is here replying to the suggestion in the *Athenaeum*'s review of the *Recollections* that 'His Chartism, in fact, seems to have been only useful to him in what is known as 'getting on in the world'. It certainly helped him to become a successful journalist'. Frost may be right to disclaim any direct connection, but the claim that his political involvement had no 'influence whatever' on his later journalistic career narrows the notion of influence. For if we examine, from a new angle, the "small part" he did play in politics, an important connection does emerge, which helps not only to account for the apparently a-political emphasis of the *Reminiscences*, but also to illuminate an important element in the social history of the period covered by Frost's life.

Some facets of Frost's early opinions and activities can here be linked together. Following Owen, he "contended that the character of each individual is formed by the circumstances by which he is surrounded, and that the provision of the best conditions was the necessary prelude to the formation of the best type of character" (Rc, p. 21); one of the reasons why Frost did not become a member of the Alcott House community was because

> Greaves and his disciples maintained, in diametrical opposition to Owen's views, that the existing generation could not be perfected, or even appreciably improved, since no amount of education or moral training, or any other external condition, could repair the defects of birth. The regeneration of society could, in their view, be brought about only individually, not by acting on masses; and the process must be internal, not external - thus reversing the formula of Owen. (Rc, pp. 41-2)

A related issue divided him finally from Barmby:

> He advocated the paternal system of government, I the democratic. "Neither democracy nor aristocracy," he wrote, "have anything to do with Communism. They are party terms of the present. In the future, governmental politics will be succeeded by industrial administration." In the present, however, it was not clear to me that men, even in small bodies, would submit to autocratic rule, however sugar-coated with a paternal aspect. (Rc, p. 71)

Frost here touches two of the most deeply significant issues of his age: the debate on the role of external factors on character-formation, and the choice between paternalism and democracy. An option for paternalism goes naturally with a reliance on external influence on the masses; a belief in the somehow innate goodness of the masses is *perhaps* a necessary premise for democracy. Frost at first tried to combine an adherence to democracy with an Owenite emphasis on external conditions. The attempted practical fusion of these diverging emphases was, for him, the small-group commune deliberately creating a small-scale alternative environment with a feed-back effect on personal relations. Once Frost had left this pro-commune phase behind him, he veered between all four possible emphases. The National Land Company perhaps echoed for him the commune ideal on a larger scale; while being involved in the ordinary, local, "mass" activities of the National Charter Association, he could nevertheless admit that "The men who openly and actively take part in any political movement are always a few compared with those who hold the same views, but do not declare themselves" (Re, p. 28), and this realisation underlies his membership of the Fraternal Democrats and his interest in Secret Societies; his later membership of the Parliamentary Reform Association seems an acceptance of a paternalist as well as a pressure-group perspective. The theoretical problem underlying Frost's shifting options has been neatly formulated:

> The materialistic doctrine concerning the changing of circumstances and education forgets that circumstances are changed by men and that the educator must himself be educated. This doctrine has therefore to divide society into two parts, one of which is superior to society. (Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*, iii)

Since Frost's fundamental perspective was opposed to any such division of society, his way of facing the implications of this problem brought him, superficially, close to Robert Lowe's solution ('We must educate our masters'), but with a crucial difference. Frost's concern with information and education for the masses, popular literature and journalism, goes beyond Lowe's acquiescence in the long liberal tradition of sharing 'culture' downwards; Frost's position embodies more than that: a recognition of the inherent value of the already existing culture of the masses. It is this that underlies his statement that

> Popular amusements constitute so important a part of a nation's social history that no excuse need be offered for the production of

the present volume (*Old Showm*en, Preface, p. v)

In the Preface to the *Lives of the Conjurers* (p. v) he speaks of "the series of works on the entertaining classes which [he] contemplated when writing *Circus Life*." In writing that series Frost was extending and deepening the interest in popular ballads, tales, legends and customs which had already played a part in widening the whole notion of culture during the nineteenth century. What is at the root of such an interest is a grasp of the close interactions between social and cultural life and between personal contributions and communal life. That grasp is presented in the opening pages of the *Reminiscences* not as an intellectual position but as deeply part of the way in which Frost experienced his life and himself. Though the *Reminiscences* opens with a concern for individual memory, the memories recounted in the first chapter are very clearly communal memories; he recalls:

> . . the draper's shop . . which had the reputation of being haunted, a belief which arose from the fact that it had formerly been an inn, and that, a century or more ago, several travellers and pedlars were known to have been entertained in the house, and were never seen afterwards . . This house . . was many years ago in the occupation of a linen-draper named Stapleton, one of whose daughters informed a cousin of my own that there was a closet in the house, the door of which had been nailed up by some former tenant, perhaps a century before, and had never been opened since. (Rm, p. 2)

He continues, testing his memory against the communal memory:

> If my memory does not deceive me as to these traditions, this was the house in which lived a singular old woman, who was long remembered by the name of Mother Hotwater, and of whom many strange stories used to be told when I was a boy. (Rm, p. 2)

He goes on to speak of the gipsies, that:

> Stories were current in my boyhood of Adam Lee ...

And that:

> An old master baker, named Theobald, told me, forty years ago, that he and Adam Lee had played the violin ...(Rm, p. 4)

He gives a picture of the kind of context that embedded these local traditions:

> I well remember her [an old Irish-woman] sitting on the doorstep, with her basket of fish by her side, relating to my grandmother and one of my mother's sisters, in a very graphic manner, the incidents of Ned's great fight with White-headed Bob. (Rm, p. 5)

Other stories that he tells are of incidents involving others, yet which are felt as part of his own life, part of his autobiography:

> I remember hearing my father relate the story of a fright which he got . . .(Rm, p. 9)

> The late Dr. Gardiner . . used to tell a story, illustrative of gipsy life and character under conditions which have long ceased to exist, which, if only for that reason, is worth telling again (Rm, pp. 9-15)

This participation in local rather than individual memories was, obviously, also "illustrative of . . conditions which [were ceasing] to exist", the conditions of a known and almost rural community. The replacement of that Croydon, known intimately as a boy, by the London suburb it had since become is one of Frost's major preoccupations in the opening chapters of the *Reminiscences*, and again he draws on longer memories than his own to establish its solid identity:

> My mother remembered Norwood when the hamlet consisted of about a score of farm-houses and cottages scattered at considerable intervals along the lanes which intersected the woods, and the only means of communication with the metropolis was the carrier's tilted cart. From the parish churches of Lambeth and Camberwell to that of Croydon there was not a single place of worship, so sparse was the population, the former places, now so populous, being then but villages, and the latter now a suburb of London, a quiet country town. (Rm, p. 6)

> These woods had been from a period far beyond the memory of the oldest inhabitant, and perhaps from the dim and distant epoch of the gipsies' first appearance in England, a favourite camping-ground of that singular remnant of an Asiatic nomad race. (Rm, pp. 7-8)

The close topographic details of the opening pages rest firmly on a sense of both continuity and discontinuity: for Frost the locality is still "Croydon" even though the changes in parts of the area and town have been so great that the returning native loses his way (Rm, p. l). But the "Croydon" which exists for Frost has, therefore, a rather curious ontological status: it exists precisely as a created world, composed not just of physical reality alone or in memory alone, but as a human 'world', one that Frost experiences not with the eyes of a Baedeker tourist but with a perception saturated by consciousness of its history and its inhabitants, a consciousness which is that not just of the individual but of the whole local community. In that kind of experience, of being 'at home', the distinction between 'external conditions' and 'internal' consciousness breaks down; it is against that kind of experience, in part, that the later experiment of a semi-artificial commune is tested.

That sense of being 'at home', of having interiorised a whole community's way of life, is, of course, an intensely 'local' one; it cannot, in the same form, be extended to a whole society. If we seek an analogue to this breakdown of the distinction between the influence of external conditions and the growth of consciousness, operating at the level of a whole society, then at least one area offers itself. It is precisely in the realm of mass communications that a similar lack of distinction operates: the complex network of newspaper publishing and educational apparatus may in one sense be part of the 'external conditions', but the actual experience of reading or learning is one where external/internal barriers crumble. Education is a process of internalisation, the contents and approach of a particular newspaper become the shared memory of its regular readers, creating in its own way a known map of the whole society. Frost's option for journalism and popular literature, then, can be seen from this angle as in continuity with the problems of his early positions, just as it can in terms of his urge to span and totalise the whole society.

The second of those early problems - that of paternalism versus democracy - is clearly related to the problems of, particularly, the newspaper world. The creation of a common political consciousness through a newspaper can be an extremely elitist activity. The notions of 'editor' and 'reporter' are inherently paternalistic. The practice of the *Northern Star* in printing reports about their own activities from the secretaries of Chartist 'localities', as opposed to relying on professional 'reporters', was an early attempt to overcome this dilemma; even the *Northern Star*. however, was dominated by the editorial direction of O'Connor. By the late nineteenth century the relative independence and integrity of professional journalists was being clearly eroded; the

final pages of the *Reminiscences* deal with precisely this problem. Frost recounts how he joined the first National Association of Journalists (Rm, pp. 324ff.) soon after its formation in 1884, and himself initiated a correspondence in the *Athenaeum* on the objects and organisation of the Association. But his aims were strictly limited to Trades Union demands of better pay and working conditions, better professional training and responsibility. Though one can locate this particular response within a wider social and political context, its most immediate significance relates it to a very specific dilemma already apparent in Frost's earlier work on popular entertainment.

Frost's *Circus Life* had ended with the conclusion, quoting Dickens's Sleary in *Hard Times*, that "people muth be amuthed. They can't be alwath a-learning, nor they can't alwath be a-working" (*Circus Life*, p. 289). This embodies a fundamentally different perspective from Frost's emphasis in early life on "how the progress of the physical sciences and mechanical arts could be made most conducive to the happiness and well-being of the people", and on the need for "the knowledge" to apply those means (Re, p. 15). The option gradually being followed by the mass newspapers towards the close of the century must have seemed to be one of offering amusement as the only alternative to working, with the process of "a-learning", at least in the sense of political education, being relatively abandoned, in comparison with the unstamped papers of the earlier part of the century. It was in that context that new directions opened in art, either towards art for its own sake, or towards the provision of knowledge, relevant to political understanding, in a semi-fictional semi-documentary form.

viii : conclusion

Frost's two autobiographies are best seen in terms of this complex set of problems. The broad distinction that can be drawn between their respective contents parallels that between politics and culture, which itself is related to the division between 'knowledge' and 'amusement', while both divisions are aspects of that sense of a fragmented society which, after the anti-climax of 1848, replaced the Utopian hope of a totalised society in which every aspect could be held in coherent connection. The fact that Frost wrote two autobiographies is itself an aspect or symptom, at the personal level, of this fragmentation. Yet at the same time an 'autobiography', in straddling the divisions between imagination and documentation, is an assertion against that fragmentation. In particular, one remaining feature of Frost's autobiographies indicates opposition to another, related, fragmentation: that in which individual life and social history are seen

as divorced from each other. For Frost's life-stories contain surprisingly little of what can be regarded, now, as 'personal' history; both works present Frost's life precisely as part of a common history, though that life is perhaps peculiarly 'representative'. In the same way, his histories of popular entertainment merge gradually into reminiscences of his own acquaintance with and memories of the fields he is investigating. In reading Frost's various works, taken together, we can enter, from a fresh angle, into what in some respects constitutes, far more than many literary works, though in a way akin to them, the communal memory of this period we have inherited.

*

PART THREE : CONCLUSIONS

i) Relationships and form

ii) Organisation and class

iii) Form and organisation

iv) Conclusion

'What are you working on?' Mr K. was asked. 'I'm having a lot of trouble' I'm preparing my next mistake,' answered Mr K.

Bertolt Brecht

This thesis began without a thesis. It set out not so much to prove any specific proposition as to see whether a particular method of critical analysis could be usefully applied to a certain kind of writing. But at least in retrospect we can, if not propose firm conclusions, raise some further questions and offer some suggestions. The form this final section takes is a series of summaries of the analyses already offered in detail above, the various summaries being developed from different and, it is hoped, complementary angles. The repetition involved is preferable, perhaps, to the complexity of any attempt at a single multi-faceted summary.

i : relationships and form

We can begin by summarising the pattern of homologies that emerged in each individual analysis, omitting here the necessary qualifications and elaborations suggested in each chapter. In the case of Bamford, we saw that his experience of a known community undergoing major changes under the pressures of population increase and industrial development was registered in the passivity of his political options, the emphasis upon friendship and the reluctance to cooperate politically with 'strangers'; the experience of social breakdown (in Bamford's eyes) was presented in terms of personal disillusionment with various friend-ships and relationships. At the stylistic level, the self-presentation in characteristically passive modes seemed to express something of this experience, as did perhaps the concentration on the process of trial and imprisonment. The actual writing of an autobiography was a choice consonant with Bamford's political desire to overcome ignorance by persuasion, but despite the numerous techniques of indirect, oblique and almost symbolic narration, the work as a whole failed to break through that formal barrier between expressing one's own experience and imagining that of fictional others.

Somerville's concern with names, in various ways, was seen to stem from his experience of being alienated from his own name, in the 1832 flogging incident; the structure of the autobiography, as a pattern of delayed and multiple identifications, seemed in part a response to the need to re-link name and person, and that need was placed within a context not just of Somerville's own experiences (in the Spanish Certificates affair or the work with the ACLL) and opinions (his option for ACLL politics, his later theories of political economy) but also of some general shifts in society in the 1840s, many of which (changes in banking and commercial structures, the growth of postal communications and of bureaucratisation) can be linked to the increasing significance of names in society.

Burn's presentation of himself as a constant traveller, both geographically and socially, in search of a respectable resting-place, which he claimed to have arrived at, was related to the circularity of his epistolatory form (the final letter embracing the first), and also to the constant highlighting of 'turning-points' which insinuated a (false) pattern into the accidental vagaries of his life; the uneasy juxtaposition of two styles and, often, two sets of values, in his actual writing was seen as embodying the ambiguity of his social position, while the structure of his autobiography, as simultaneously static and moving, was related to certain aspects of the 1850s and 1860s - the policies of 'New Model Unionism', the ethos of 'Self-Help', the housing and lodger franchise problems.

The attempt by Frost, in his life and in his work as a newspaper editor, to touch upon and connect almost every facet of the nineteenth century was fairly directly conveyed in the content of his two autobiographies; yet the difference of emphasis between the two works (the inclusion of politics in one, its virtual exclusion from the other) indicated the failure of the attempt to arrive at a political totalisation; the pattern clearly visible in the first half of the *Recollections* (the interweaving of poetry and politics and the use of one to comment indirectly upon the other), yet fragmented in the second half (the separating out of each element and their discrete allocation to different chapters), seemed to be related to a sense of failure after the events of 1848 (presented indirectly, at the turning-point of the work, in terms of Blackaby's death); the presence of anti-climactic stylistic features was interpreted as part of the same sense of movement towards an aim not fully realised yet felt to be tantalisingly close.

It is also possible, however, to read these works in terms of what is common to them rather than. what characterises each individually. All four studies revealed, in different ways, a concern with relationships, personal and social. The tension between belonging to a known community and learning to be a 'stranger' to and with others was central to Bamford; in particular his relations with women offered an indication of wider social problems. His encounter with a prostitute whose name he suddenly learns and recognises (1: vii) can be compared with Somerville's delayed recognition, despite the given name, of his own brother (2: iii). Somerville, like Bamford, was born into an intimately known world (2: i) but learned, in a distressing way, to live as a person simultaneously known and unknown in a larger and different kind of social world; in that context, what was a minor element in Bamford's sensibility - the separation of attributes from the people possessing them (1: vi) - became a major feature in Somerville's self-consciousness, as even his own name became alienated from him.

Burn, on the other hand, marked his break with his family origins by deliberately erasing two syllables from his name (3: i), and those origins were, like Bamford's (l: ii), characterised by a loss of parental love (3: i); Burn seems to have spent the rest of his life seeking a role and a home, and his autobiography is itself offered as an expression of his parental relation to his son. Frost, by contrast with. Bamford, Somerville and Burn, is ostensibly undisturbed by a sense of his many roles (4: iv) and easily accepts that, as a journalist rather than a celebrity, he is both known and unknown to society yet, like Bamford, he affects the reader indirectly at times, places friendship - the particular friendship with Blackaby - at the centre of his *Recollections*. and can be seen also as trying in a new way to re-discover the experience of a known community.

Frost's community, however, was not a local one, as Bamford's was: Frost as an editor was related to a wider society in two ways, both as trying to organise the daily news of a whole society and as editor for many different local communities (4: iii). That he found little difficulty in writing numerous novels, whereas Bamford mainly hovered on the brink of the novel-form, is perhaps related to that difference in relationship to communities. For to write is to enter into a relationship with a reader, and various forms of writing involve and imply various forms of relationship. As we saw, Bamford attempts to persuade his reader to enter into a sympathetic, sometimes intimate and sometimes even inward relationship with himself: he invites the reader to participate, not directly but obliquely, in his own deepest experiences and emotions, using poetry, parallels and juxtapositions with considerable effect yet leaving the main imaginative effort and impact somewhat subliminal or latent. Somerville's relation to his reader is also latent, in a different way: that the writer is Somerville and various finally identical 'Somervilles' is left to be discovered gradually, as the reader makes the identifications step by step; it is an odd form of relationship, but directly reflects Somerville's actual experience of being recognised and mis-recognised (2: ii). Somerville at one point reveals, as Bamford inadequately does, a novelist's interest in creating' fictional characters - imagining people from names on gravestones (2: i) - and at another he toys with an epistolatory form (2: i). Burn deliberately appropriates the letter-form and in presenting a direct relationship with. his son, one of paternal advice, indirectly brings his reader into a collaborative relationship with himself and his ambitions: by reading the autobiography as if from Burn's own achieved position of relative stability, the reader endorses and validates his claims. Burn's relation to his reader is both one of advice - he offers a 'biography of success' - and of tantalisation, suggesting constantly a coherence that

only eventually, and somewhat spuriously, emerges. Frost's is equally tantalising: whereas Burn insists on alleged turning-points. Frost nonchalantly presents anti-climaxes. But Frost also offers an impressive over-view of a whole society, as Burn attempted in the 1882 supplement (3: ix); moreover, whereas Bamford sees himself as a stranger outside his own community and Burn occasionally treats the reader as a stranger needing guidance in unknown cities (3: viii), Frost shares with the reader a lifetime of varied, and often 'inside', experience in a whole society known to both.

To write, to communicate, at all is to enter into a relationship; to write a work of a conventionally classifiable kind - a novel, a drama, a letter, a television script, a thriller, an academic article, a thesis - is to participate in an existing set of social relationships, ranging from the established relations of production (the relationships between author and publishers, television companies, editors of journals, etc.) to what might be termed the relations of expectation: the reader expects, and the author implicitly agrees to provide, a particular kind of enjoyment, satisfaction, information or illumination. Those relations are embodied not just in the structures of production and distribution of a complex industry of communications, but in the conventions of writing itself - they are indicated in what is normally thought of as 'genre'. Insofar as a work is clearly written within a particular genre it rests upon, recreates and endorses a more or less specific set of social relations.

But in what sense is 'autobiography' a 'genre'? It is notoriously difficult, for example, for a librarian to classify an autobiography: does Collingwood's *Autobiography* go into the 'history' section, is Freud's *An Autobiographical, Study* to be shelved with 'psychiatry', can *Thomae Hobbes Halmesburiae Vita, carmine expressa* really be regarded as a philosophical work? The problem is partly solved by collected editions, a 'biography' section or relegation to a secondary catalogue-number. But the problem remains, because an autobiography by a practitioner in a particular discipline is only a contribution to that discipline insofar as his 'experience' is seen as of benefit to subsequent practitioners. Put another way, a genre embodies a long experience, a tradition or convention, a way of writing that operates within a certain set of purposes and problems and comprises a cumulative set of solutions - how to maintain suspense, how to depict a character, how to present information clearly for reference purposes, how to organise the data from a scientific experiment coherently; but an autobiography is concerned with rather less specifiable problems ('life'?) and the notion of inherited, cumulative solutions seems peculiarly inappropriate. Clearly, much autobiographical writing does operate within conventions, but since the ostensible subject is, by definition, unique,

in writing an autobiography above all

every attempt
Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure.

Certainly in the case of the four autobiographies examined in this study, though there are connections between them and also with other works and genres , it would be difficult to categorise them as other than individual attempts and different kinds of failure.

ii : organisation and class

Yet part of what this thesis set out to test was whether a connection existed between some autobiographies and the shared class of their authors - the implicit claim of much 'sociology of literature'. So far, some connections between each individual work and the particular historical context of that work have been suggested, but these connections have been made mainly at the level of features of nineteenth century British society 'as a whole', though at different times and to some extent in different places - industrialisation in Lancashire, bureaucratisation in the 1840s, the dilemmas of the age of equipoise, the many aspects touched upon by Frost. The notion of individual 'experience' may, however, lead us to a more particular connection:

> we had the experience but missed the meaning,
> And approach to the meaning restores the experience
> In a different form....
> . . I have said before
> That the past experience revived in the meaning
> Is not the experience of one life only
> But of many generations.

When Samuel Bamford complains (l: iv):

> We had not any of our own rank with whom to advise for the better, - no man of other days who had gone through the ordeal of experience; and whose judgement might have directed our self-devotion

the reader is offered a broad hint: Bamford is presenting himself as a man of 'experience', whose judgement we should accept, just as Burn later offers his own experience as a model for his son. But there are

other ways of learning from, and even inheriting, the experience of an earlier generation. As an author inherits a genre, so it is possible to inherit - and enter into - an organisation, an institutionalised form of social relationships which embodies a cumulative response to certain kinds of problem.

An organisation, like a genre, is a form of relationship - and so too is a class. Class is a relationship in two ways, internally by identity and externally by negation: to belong to a class is simultaneously to be identified, in some respects, with other members of that class and to be both differentiated from and in an active relationship to another class, whether as employed to employing, governed to governing, or both. In this light, we can again approach the form and meaning of these autobiographies.

In the analyses of all four, many organisations have been mentioned: the Manchester Constitutional Society of 1798, the Hampden Clubs of 1816 the secret committees of 1811-12, the Armed Association of Manchester Loyalists, Hunt's 'order' of knights, the Anti-Corn Law League, the Chartists, the Glasgow Trades Committee, the Journeymen Hatters' Union, the Oddfellows' Society, the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, the Fraternal Democrats, the National Land Company, the 'Secret Societies of the European Revolution', the National Association of Journalists, even Disraeli's new Conservative Party. The history of the nineteenth century, and particularly of the working class from 1780 to 1880, is permeated with organisations. But organisations, it was suggested above, are solutions to problems. It is the problems rather than particular solutions that are primarily reflected in these autobiographies.

Bamford's central problem was that he was unable, finally, to break out of his known community, to operate in a world of strangers. But the making of a class involves, precisely, the achievement of an acknowledged relationship between people who are, in personal terms, strangers to one another. It involves both an ability to recognise an affinity, an economic and political identity, with strangers whom one may never even meet, and a willingness to recognise and work with strangers from the same class whom one does meet. Bamford's experience of having to identify himself to radicals in London (l: iii) is one aspect of how that recognition can be made; his unwillingness to introduce himself to other radicals, casually met with, is perhaps one mark of his limits in this respect (l: iii). For Bamford, any organisation that tried to bring together and coordinate the efforts of a class, rather than a local community, could only be seen, ultimately, as a form of coercion (l: iv), as an alien phenomenon.

The dates which are particularly relevant in the case of Bamford are,

I would suggest, 1788, 1819 and 1839-41, the date of his birth, of Peterloo, and of the first version of *Passages*. The period they cover is that of, in Thompson's term, 'the making of the English working class' - from the establishment of the London Corresponding Society, through attempts at a 'General Union', to the first high-point of Chartism. In those early decades of the period under study, the problem for the working class was to recognise, and make, itself as a class, to realise that the scattered individuals and local groupings that suffered from and confusedly opposed the social changes consequent upon increasing industrialisation were related to each other in a way that went beyond personal acquaintance or friendship. There had to be some effective recognition that a 'radical' in Manchester, for example, could no longer be content to work only with those known personally to him, but must accept the cooperation of those from other areas and different backgrounds who saw themselves as sharing in his political dilemmas. Unless that fundamental breakthrough, both in perception and in practical activity, was made, only an impotently passive response, at the local level, was possible and the result would tend to be the breakdown of the existing local groupings and a retreat by each individual into a guarded but ultimately defenceless domesticity The analysis of Bamford seems to exemplify this pattern.

But even if that recognition of the need to ally with 'strangers' was achieved, another problem would emerge: one could accept that individuals from different areas had to become connected, or organised, in new ways, but if the modes of relationship available were themselves inadequate, if the attempt to connect reduced the relationship of those connected to a merely abstract and empty knowledge of each other, then the implicit model of the society to be achieved and built upon the basis of that mode of organisation would be deeply unsatisfactory as a counter-response to the society whose alienating and de-personalising effects had been the motivation for and motor of opposition in the first place. It is precisely that mode of abstract relationship which can characterise the exchange of formal and instrumental letters - personal communication turned to public use - or can result from merely subscribing financially to a 'national' body which then treats its 'members' as numerical units. The Anti-Corn Law League seems to exemplify this model, and Chartism to some extent also did: with the increased use of massive petitions and massive demonstrations as the main forms of agitation, the ordinary Chartist could become merely a signature and a unit in a newspaper estimate. At the same time, the Chartist land scheme attempted to offer a return to an earlier form of local, face-to-face and non-

bureaucratised community, where personal dignity, and personal possession, could be maintained. The two implicit models of society in this mixture of tactics and programme were perhaps, ultimately, incompatible. Somerville's work is focussed on the period which included the beginnings, apex, and final decline of Chartism - the year of his flogging, 1832, saw the initial disillusionment after the Reform agitation, 1848 was the year of his *Autobiography*, and by the time of *Conservative Science* in 1860 even Jones had accepted compromise. His work as a whole seems to show him as caught in precisely this problem - the incompatibility of two social definitions of identity. Some of his particular experiences, however, indicate the extent to which earlier problems had been solved: for example, his name can now act as sufficient recommendation for other radicals, though strangers to him, to accept and work with him (2: ii).

The problem of authenticating the credentials of strangers had been long solved within the Trade Unions - through the 'blank' system (3: vii) -by the 1850s. But in that decade a new form of an old dilemma perhaps appeared. For even when an organised relationship between members of the same class has been achieved, as in Trade Unionism, a. problem remains: for if class is also a relationship between classes, and if the existing relationship is not seen, or no longer seen, as modifiable in a radical way, then one response is to seek a more satisfying integration within the existing structure of social relations. For an individual to do so is a relatively unproblematic option, requiring simply a sustained effort at personal advancement, and perhaps some self-deception, but for a class as a whole to advance socially without modifying the overall social structure is almost contradictory. Such a strategy implies either that while major historical transformation of the society has been suspended, nevertheless a major change has somehow occurred within the society (a paradoxical model of society as simultaneously static and moving) or that the society as a whole is advancing (perhaps in. economic terms), thereby enabling each sector or stratum to 'improve' its (e.g. economic) position while remaining fixed in relative terms *vis-a-vis* each other - and such an operation is extremely fragile, implying that no fundamental dislocation of relative status will occur, while the possibility of dislocation is constantly and inherently present in the process. Both these paradoxes seem present in the form of Burn's self-presentation: simultaneously static and moving, simultaneously accidental and coherent, simultaneously patterned as constant but abortive 'turning-points' and yet seen as moving smoothly to a declared goal. The structural parallel between this pattern and the policies of 'New Model Unionism' is fairly clear: an attempt to profit

from the increased prosperity of an imperialist society without dangerously challenging (even by such minor yet pregnant crisis-points as strikes) those exploitative aspects of the society which were, in one sense, the basis of the prosperity-available to be shared. In that perspective, class-collaboration and an uneasy fusion of styles of organisation is the natural option.

A different response to the problem of finding or forging a mode of organisation (and, implicitly, a model of a new society) which both connected individuals on a national scale and escaped the danger of de-personalisation, could be to achieve a small-scale personal community and then extend the ethos of that community gradually to the whole society; this was Frost's 'Owenite' solution. But to achieve the transition from a shared way of life on a small scale to an adequately human way of life on a. national scale requires something, at the national level, akin to the elements of personal knowledge, shared 'culture' (in its widest sense), shared interpretation of social reality, shared values and the possibility of mutually communicating ideas and experiences which are necessary to sustain a. community at the face-to-face level. A national newspaper is a medium in which and through which some of these elements can be created, while the re-discovery and re-activation of a tradition of 'popular culture' is another means of trying to provide a common basis for a unified and non-divisive society; both newspapers and the re-discovery of popular culture were, as we saw, important for Frost. But the creation of those elements alone would be inadequate if directly economic and formal political structures remained unchanged; a 'cultural' change in relationships would still require new forms of unified economic and political pressure - and the emergence and relative cooperation of organisations like the Social Democratic Federation, the Fabians, the Independent Labour ^arty and the 'New' Unions between 1880 and 1900 attempted, finally, to meet this need - yet, correspondingly, a fusion of economic and political modes of organisation without the dimension of concern with 'cultural' aspects of living could still result in a bureaucratised and depersonalised society. Both elements, the economic-political and the 'cultural', would be necessary for any hegemonic or totalised opposition to and replacement of the existing society - for the society as a whole to be re-made not simply in the past image of any particular class, but in terms of an entirely new model of social relationships. The sense that one or other of these elements was in some sense available but not both simultaneously or not both in a fused manner would result in a feeling of tantalising anti-climax. Frost, writing in 1880 (and even in 1886) would surely have found many of the latent problems and achievements of the coming

decades at best barely visible, despite even his capacity for discerning early trends; for him in any case, as he presents it, the anti-climax had already occurred thirty years before - yet the pattern of his *Recollections* still suggests a continued attempt, even so, to fuse 'politics' and 'poetry'; in his later searches for missing persons (4: vi), one sometimes has the odd feeling that he is still looking for and hoping to meet Jem Blackaby, the dead Chartist poet.

iii : form and organisation

The interpretation offered in the preceding sections is a tentative, and perhaps inadequately formulated, hypothesis: its main suggestion is that the pattern, of homologies revealed in the analysis of each autobiography can be related to a (theoretical) *sequence* of problems of organisation facing the working class as a whole in. the nineteenth century. But, it may be objected, to talk about the problems of the working class 'as a whole' being present in the autobiographical writings of four individuals is to imply a rather curious claim - that, at least, these four are in some way 'representative', though in any obvious sense they are clearly not. If, however, we now recall more precisely some points made in the Introduction a clarification of the claim made may be possible.

It was there pointed out that Lukács distinguished between 'actual' and 'imputed' class consciousness; clearly, the 'actual' consciousness of these individuals has to be analysed in terms of their specific lives and problems, and the individual analyses in Part Two have tried to respect that specificity. But to suggest that some aspects of the content and, particularly, the form of these writings can be related to more general problems is to indicate that the notion of 'imputed class consciousness' may be to some extent intelligible not in terms of solutions to particular problems arrived at by individuals but in terms of a general framework of problems which, precisely because they remain as unsolved problems, provide a context in which individual solutions are offered. Insofar as the personal problems of relationship experienced by these writers are directly dependent upon wider problems of relationship, their awareness and expression of the former will reflect the latter.

Thus, Bamford's inability or reluctance to trust and work politically with strangers could have been overcome (if at all) had there been available a political organisation which he could trust, of which he was a member, and which could have provided adequate credentials to each of its members as a way of 'introducing' them to each other. Somerville's sense of an alienating divorce between himself and his

name could perhaps have been overcome in the context of an organisation in which each 'member was personally known to every other member, or at least in which the temptation to use people in a purely instrumental fashion was not present. Obviously, also, Burn's dilemma of how to achieve a satisfactory position in the social structure while not endangering that structure would not have existed had the possibility been available of successfully transforming the whole social structure in such a way that 'beggars' need not have existed, that 'respectable' would not have been an epithet restricted to only certain functions and people in the society, and that different ways of living and even speaking would not have carried with them overtones of social status and worth. Frost's attempt in his own life to encompass and connect every aspect of society coherently would remain abortive unless a society could be created which was genuinely coherent - in which the connections between the various actions of individuals and groups and the various products (economic, cultural, political, social) of the multiple interacting processes in the society were at least transparently visible and at best intentionally coordinated.

This is not to say that such political organisations or forms of society were historically possible in 1819, 1832, 1855 or 1880 (or even possible in principle) but that a *need* for such organisations and modes of society is implicit in the political and personal problems of Bamford and Somerville, Burn and Frost. And, of course, implicit in the need for such organisations is the need for a different kind of society, of which the political organisation is to be the creator and perhaps the prototype, just as the need for a. new kind of society implies the need for an appropriate means of achieving it. The *desire* for a new kind of society is indeed explicit in Bamford, Somerville, and Frost (and even at times in Burn), and the *demand* for a resolution of their particular problems as individuals is also explicit; the analyses and conclusions I have suggested perhaps indicate that the need to solve also certain organisational problems is neither fully conscious nor simply 'unconscious' but, in Goldmann's term, non-conscious - i.e. can be articulated, either by other people facing basically the same problems, or, as in the critical analyses offered above, can be seen to be implicit in the problems of which the individual is conscious.

In effect, one can claim that there are two ways of reading these texts: one can read them either as narratives of certain personal concerns and problems, or one can read them as expressions of social problems of which their authors are perhaps not explicitly aware. Moreover, the problems involved in. writing at the narrative-level can be seen, precisely, as a substitute response to the problems of organising at the social or political level; if the social problems of

relationship cannot be solved in practice, by the creation of an appropriate organisation, they can be 'solved' in a literally formal sense by writing an autobiography. Bamford can make his stranger-readers friends, Somerville can validate his own complex self-identification. Burn can achieve respectability, Frost can embrace the whole society and even fuse "poetry' and "politics' - but only in the sphere of writing..The area in which these authors are aware of the problems of changing their relationship to others is that of literary form.

The points made in this section are indirectly echoed elsewhere in Lukács's *History and_ Class Consciousness*. In the final essay in the volume Lukács writes:

> the self-knowledge of the proletariat is a knowledge of its objective situation at a given stage of historical development (p. 328)

yet:

> for each -individual worker, because his own consciousness is reified, the road to achieving the objectively possible class consciousness . . must pass through the process of comprehending his own immediate experience only after he has experienced it (p. 317)

since

> a problem always makes its appearance first as an abstract possibility and only afterwards is it realised in concrete. (p. 296)

The essay is entitled 'Towards a methodology of the problem of organisation' and Lukács finally sees the concrete form of the objectively possible class consciousness as embodied in the particular form of an organisation, since

> Organisation is the form of mediation between theory and practice. And, as in every dialectical relationship, the terms of the relation only acquire concreteness and reality in and by virtue of this mediation. The ability of organisation to mediate between theory and practice is seen most clearly by the way in which it manifests a much greater, finer and more confident sensitivity towards divergent trends than any other sector of political thought and action. On the level of pure theory the most disparate views and tendencies are able to co-exist peacefully, antagonisms are

> only expressed in the form of discussions which can be contained within the framework of one and the same organisation without disrupting it. But no sooner are these same questions given organisational form than they turn out to be sharply opposed and even incompatible. (p. 299)

In reading these passages, one is tempted to note again the parallel between literary form and political organisation: it is in the form of their autobiographies that these writers both revealed, made comprehensible, and reconciled, in an abstract way, the antagonisms and incompatibilities in their actual situations. One can perhaps also see in these passages the intellectual origins of Lukács's concern with 'sociology of literature'.

In the same essay, Lukács argues that the Communist Party, as a group organised in a specific way, is the most appropriate embodiment of imputed class consciousness. Whatever the merits of this aspect of his argument, I have rather suggested that it is not the presence of a particular organisational solution that is revealed as important in the analyses offered but the implicit presence of a series of interlinked, problems of organisation. It is this emphasis that may help to clarify another question raised in the Introduction: the nature of the 'labour movement'. For insofar as the four individuals examined were related to the 'labour movement', as in some sense they clearly were, I would suggest that it was partly by being involved in the problem of what comprises a movement and how it is constituted, and that perhaps an appropriate way of 'reading' or approaching 'labour history' would be not only in terms of 'solutions' (actual organisations, actual events, influences, achievements, crises, etc) but also in terms of those underlying problems to which more or less satisfactory solutions were proposed, theoretically and practically; the continuity and shape of a. movement may indeed lie most basically at the level of a continuity and inheritance of still unresolved problems, and the study of autobiographies may help us, in a new way, to comprehend those problems.

iv : conclusion

This conclusion has tried to suggest a variety of connections between the rather unusual 'genre' of autobiography, at least in the specific cases examined, and various problems of relationship in nineteenth century society, particularly in terms of class-relationships. I hope too that other questions have been raised by the study as a whole: the relation between 'autobiography' and 'literature' , whether in terms of form or of the place of either in the culture of a period; the problem

of what constitutes a 'literary' work, as opposed to other forms of writing, is obviously an implicit variation on this point; and, again by implication, certain questions about the possible functions, objects, and modes of 'literary criticism' may have been raised by the kind of analysis offered. If the application of a combination of 'close reading' and 'sociology of literature' approaches to writings not normally regarded as within the scope of literary criticism has resulted in any suggestions of interest to the labour historian, and perhaps also to the political theorist, as well as to the critic of fiction, then this thesis has achieved something of its aim. It is difficult to summarise that aim, but - to give the last word to that rather forgotten but interesting journalist, Thomas Frost - I hope that I have helped to clarify some of the unexpected, but I believe valid, connections he suggests in one short but compressed paragraph:

> I had just been reading Coleridge's 'Religious ?Musings', and the brief address in which the philosopher of New Lanark had set forth the principles of his new constitution of society sent me to the poem again. The scheme of the philosopher seemed to be the due response to the aspirations of the poet. At that time, however, it interested me chiefly in its metaphysical aspect. It was not until after I read the grand and wondrous poems of Shelley, two or three years later, that my mind became impressed with the connexion between the influence of circumstances in the formation of character and the new organisation which Owen desired to give society.

*

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1. Primary texts

    a) Bamford

    b) Somerville

    c) Burn

    d) Frost

2. secondary works

    a) Studies of autobiography

    b) History

    c) Literature

    d) Other works

Primary texts: details of publisher, as well as place of publication, have usually been included in order to indicate those publishers responsible for making working-class memoirs and related writings available.

Secondary works: place of publication is London unless otherwise indicated. Only those works which have significantly influenced the argument of this study have been included.

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Titles are given in slightly abbreviated form.

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5 chapters additional to the 1843 edition follow, numbered XLVIII, XLIX, L, L (*sic*), LI; LI ends (II, p. 274) dated Dec. 13th 1844.

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Northern Star, 1847
Commonwealth, 1848
National Instructor, 1850
Chambers Papers for the People, 1850-51
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Birmingham Journal, 1855-59
Liverpool Daily Post, 1855 -
Birmingham Daily Post, 1857 -
Liverpool Albion, 1859 -
Boys of England, 1869
Gentleman's Journal, 1872, editor.
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Croydon Chronicle, 1875
Boys Own Paper, 1879
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*

AFTERWORD

This *Afterword*, appropriately enough, is partly autobiographical. The thesis you have now, I hope, read (abbreviated as *ACC*) was written fifty years ago and I will refer to its author as Sharratt. Looking at it now, having myself spent some of those years supervising and examining other people's Ph.D. theses, I would probably pass *ACC*. With some reservations. By today's academic standards (which are not necessarily an improvement) there is a glaring problem with the approach taken by *ACC* : that little attempt is made to 'check' the accounts given by the autobiographers against the 'facts'. When, for example, Thomas Frost claims that in 1848 there was a street 'rehearsal' for an 'insurrection' (page 161), Sharratt offers no evidence that the claim is true (though a footnote acknowledged the point). In effect, the autobiographies are treated as if they were fiction, as constructing a world which did not necessarily exist outside the depiction created by the text, any more than the world of *Macbeth* or *Lear* exists outside the drama created by Shakespeare. L. C. Knights once made the point somewhat mockingly: that it makes no sense to ask "How many children had Lady Macbeth?" That Sharratt deliberately analyses the autobiographies as in effect closed world fictions or even quasi-novels raises two possible objections.

First, that this thesis is not sufficiently concerned with 'actual' 'history' and fails to meet the demands of empirical research. As evidence, for example, is the reliance in citations upon not the actual documents in the Public Record Office of the reports of Home Office spies but the excerpts of those records as included in, for example, Darvall. The decisive evidence against Sharratt was his careless mistake in claiming that Frost wrote a weekly piece in the *Barnsley Times* in 1882. E. P. Thompson challenged this in the *viva* examination, insisting that the statement was incorrect. Which flummoxed Sharratt – until Thompson pointed out that for one week during that period the *Barnsley Times* was on strike and did not publish. So any later researcher, relying upon Sharratt's misleading reference, might believe that the weekly claim was correct and would futilely pursue a non-existent 'missing' issue. Until Sharratt corrected this statement, the thesis could not be approved. It took a year to get round to checking Thompson's own statement and the result is the extended entry on the *Barnsley Times* in the revised bibliography. It was a lesson duly learned about researching 'history'.

On the other hand, a second objection to the thesis could have been that in subjecting the autobiographies to the kind of 'close reading' of the details of the text appropriate (in a Leavisite approach) to the

critical analysis of a novel, the thesis failed to offer any systematic reflection upon the difference between 'fiction' and 'autobiography'. Moreover, it failed to provide a clear theory about the *genre* of autobiography. How could one apply a literary-critical approach to a text which was not 'literature'?

Taken together, these two objections raised the question of which Faculty could or should properly examine the thesis, a question which delayed its actual examination while the university administration debated its proper categorisation. A solution was suggested: that since the ancient University of Cambridge had finally and rather belatedly just inaugurated a 'Social Sciences Faculty' – a novel idea at that time in Cambridge – the awkward Sharratt thesis could be diverted or relegated to this upstart new disciplinary territory. However, did the thesis meet the criteria of a social *science* degree? What, indeed, counted as research in 'social sciences', especially if the work did not involve substantial empirical investigation, preferably statistical? So, perhaps instead the philosophy Faculty (quaintly known as Moral Sciences) could step in since, it seemed, Sharratt's submitted title was some kind of allusion to a work entitled *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein. Studien uber marxistische Dialektik* **(**or *History and Class Consciousness*) which had been published by a Hungarian in 1923 and was perhaps a 'philosophical' work. But nobody in Moral Sciences (philosophy) seemed, in 1970, to have any appropriate expertise in the work of György von Lukács. (The German student leader Rudi Dutschke had a similar problem when, having survived an assassin's bullet, he took refuge in the UK by registering as a research student in Cambridge, partly to work on Lukács – until he was deported.)

The Sharratt thesis was quite simply an anomaly. Perhaps even because a shade ahead of its time, since 'life writing' was yet to proliferate as the preferred *genre* for social 'marginals', such as women (*sic*), 'Labour History' had barely become academically respectable (as the paucity of the bibliography demonstrates), and unwelcome oddities like 'Commonwealth Literature' (more marginals) were only just beginning to intrude into the received Canon of Literature. But the anomaly was dealt with, somehow. A forward-looking compromise can always be found in Cambridge.

But not, perhaps in other circles. Thompson had also insisted that Sharratt recast his bibliography to highlight the obscure publishers of these unusual texts and also to follow the (then) bibliographical conventions of the History Faculty, since he remarked that "historians will want to read this". Well, to speak now in *propria persona*, the obvious place to publish a version of the thesis was then the fairly new publishing house of *New Left Review*, 'New Left Books', just embarking

on a programme of translating the canon of 'Western Marxism'. I duly sent the typescript. And waited. I was eventually invited to have a coffee with an NLB emissary. I think it was Quintin Hoare. Who, as I recall the brief conversation, informed me that an editorial committee had voted. And a work so clearly signalled as Lukácsian in its tendencies was not politically acceptable to the majority. My typescript was returned. I rather wondered, but did not ask, whether the imprimatur of E. P. Thompson was perhaps a negative factor, but the internal politics of the politics of *NLR* were sufficiently opaque to me that I didn't inquire further.

However, the exchange did ruefully remind me of one strand in Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* which had shaped the conclusion to the thesis: that a political grouping, movement, party, or government can entertain and even publish a variety of opinions, tendencies, strategic options, and so on – until a concrete and specific action is required, at which point only one decision can be implemented. Yes or No.

My supervisor Arthur Sale had, however, meanwhile suggested to Hutchinson, a respectable and established publisher, that the thesis might interest them. An exchange followed, but it became clear that what Hutchinson envisaged was, in effect, a series of new editions of the autobiography texts themselves, with a scholarly introduction to each separate volume by Sharratt. Which was a commendable enterprise aimed at a market of professional historians, and perhaps an emerging readership for 'marginal' voices. The proposal lapsed after a while.

I put the increasingly tattered typescript in a filing cabinet and got on with trying to launch a Film Studies degree at the University of Kent. I had been hired to teach on a 'sociology of literature' course (another now faded label) but that slot was already pre-occupied and since inter-, multi-, cross-disciplinary work was flourishing at Kent I thrived on initiating courses and programs. And, thankfully, there was then no pressure to 'publish or perish' so I was not cajoled or blackmailed into submitting separate chapters as articles, the usual fodder of professional journals and early career academics. Separate articles or introductions to single texts taken from the thesis would rather miss the overall point of the argument. Which finally derived almost as much from Lacan as from Lukács, another influence not to be publicised in submitting a Cambridge thesis in 1971.

Not that Lacan was prominent in the thesis, although coyly indicated in the bibliography. I had struggled through *Écrits* and found it impossible to *think* like Lacan. But one insight had stuck. Which I

reworked or travestied into my own appropriation of a set of terms, which were signalled in the thesis by a few italics (p. 203):

> This is not to say that such political organisations or forms of society were historically possible in 1819, 1832, 1855 or 1880 (or even possible in principle) but that a *need* for such organisations and modes of society is implicit in the political and personal problems of Bamford and Somerville, Burn and Frost. And, of course, implicit in the need for such organisations is the need for a different kind of society, of which the political organisation is to be the creator and perhaps the prototype, just as the need for a new kind of society implies the need for an appropriate means of achieving it. The *desire* for a new kind of society is indeed explicit in Bamford, Somerville, and Frost (and even at times in Burn), and the *demand* for a resolution of their particular problems as individuals is also explicit; the analyses and conclusions I have suggested perhaps indicate that the need to solve also certain organisational problems is neither fully conscious nor simply 'unconscious' but, in Goldmann's term, non-conscious – i.e. can be articulated, either by other people facing basically the same problems, or, as in the critical analyses offered above, can be seen to be implicit in the problems of which the individual is conscious.

The distinction or distance between demand and need and desire and the associated notion of *béance*, a hole, gap, lack, an absence in the very fabric, struck me as apposite to what had emerged (it *was* 'research') from the thesis. Lacan's terms and schema could be interpreted or scrambled as cognate with, and perhaps more interesting than, Lukács's own terminology of 'consciousness' as 'actual', 'false' and 'imputed' – the notion that most working-class people were, in effect, unable to shake off the shackles of an inadequate and incomplete understanding of their own class position and therefore needed illumination and guidance as to their true interests by a suitably more 'conscious' political leadership. One problem with this was that the working class people I knew were perfectly clear as to what was needed in their lives and the problem was how to get it, preferably also for others in the same position. Liverpool dockers did not want to be told what they should demand or were much impressed by most people or parties who promised to deliver it.

There was also a certain consonance with the then popular Trotskyist notion of 'transitional demands', those slogan-friendly 'demands' in some local or immediate conflict which could not be met

without further demands at some higher level being activated. A wage demand implied, if followed through, a factory under workers control, which itself could only be implemented if… A correct analysis, comrade, but why don't we (that is, the I.S. or I.M.G.) start at the top – wherever that is these days?

I had been somewhat involved in the 1967-68 'May Day Manifesto' project which, in one respect, had the ambition of providing the kind of 'totalising' analysis required by Lukács's overall argument: an all-embracing political linking of every element demanding transformation, economic, cultural, political, constitutional, technological, with the *Manifesto* articulating the connections between, say, interest rates and foreign policy, military expenditure and the balance of payments, the Arts Council and council housing – if not quite in that order. I recall Raymond Williams at the launch of *MDM* recounting how the various analytical sections had gradually come together as the written chapters were literally re-ordered and overlapped along the length of the table where the final draft was completed, until the converging and cumulating overall analysis led inexorably to the question of agency and implementation – but there, sadly, the table ended. Quite so.

MDM was not just a text, a Penguin paperback. For a year or so, it was… – well, what? My one public intervention, as I recall, was when a motion was put to a large 'conference' (?) of impressively varied representatives from most Left groupings of the time. The motion concerned putting up parliamentary candidates in the next General Election. I naïvely asked, on a point of order, whether the wording of the motion implied or assumed a 'party' or a 'movement'? Peggy Duff ruled me out of order and the motion was put. I forget whether it was carried or not. Meanwhile, *les évènements* unrolled in Paris.

Three years later, pulling the threads of the thesis together, I recognised an old problem. The autobiographers, between them, had been involved in a spectrum of organisations, from Bamford's local group organising a demo (which became 'Peterloo'), to Somerville contributing to a national well-organised pressure group and lobbying campaign operating by weekly letters, to Burn orchestrating a massive Trade Union rally, and Frost from having a hand in a local *Communist Chronicle* in Croydon, to involvement in the great Chartist debacle of Kennington Common, the almost insurrectionary mode of the Fraternal Democrats "and more" of 1848, and his later role in the National Union of Journalists, after a lifetime of seeking his own 'totalisation' of his times.

Each strategy had been a partial failure, a temporary success, an advancement, a reversal, an overall defeat. But, it seemed, at another

level what was constantly left 'wanting' was the insistent if only indirectly articulated, beyond, below, or beneath, the specific demands which formulated the needs which even if partly met would not satisfy the drive, impulse, desire, which shaped the lives of these writers who would not settle for what the overall social reality of the time offered them. Which is what is registered in each autobiography: what speaks insistently is a hope for a whole other form of society, almost a latent utopian structure of feeling.

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In 1982 I included a shortened version of *ACC* in an idiosyncratic book, or non-book, *Reading Relations*, but its function within the overall structure of *RR*, as a dialectical counter to the (mock) Althusserian sections, was not much recognised. Though I treasure Kate Belsey's remark in her negative review that at least the *ACC* part was preferable to doing the ironing. In 1984 I was asked to devise yet another degree program, to be oriented towards developments in the next 20 years… I took Wittgenstein's advice to Leavis: "Give up literary criticism" and as a farewell to 'lit. crit.' wrote *Literary Labyrinth* in an enjoyable week of scribbling 'reviews' of the imagined books I would no longer have the time to write – including a *Materialist Autobiography*.

I had once coined the phrase 'Mrs Gaskell syndrome' which encapsulated the glum notion that, when faced with a political event or issue in which you felt somehow obliged to intervene, the temptation was to write a book about it in order to encourage one's readers to intervene, perhaps by themselves writing a book to encourage… – and so on. Somewhat unfair to Mrs Gaskell's *Mary Barton* – but the new degree programme was intended to be different, an ongoing educational intervention into a predicted future with an emphasis on the practical relations between cultural and technological change.

Entitled 'Communications & Image Studies' (CIS) the degree tried to anticipate the convergence of technologies, mass media and telephone, television and digital computers, the emergent Internet and 'pro-sumer' digital video equipment. What form of university education and critique was to be relevant or appropriate? The course did not quite anticipate the smartphone, but did try to situate substantial changes in the dominant communications system within a comprehensive historical and theoretical context, while also insisting on some basic hands-on experience of actually producing interactive multimedia (another faded term of its time). It was an optimistic scenario. In 1999 we were informed that such a degree program had no place in Humanities and should be relocated to Business Studies. I took early retirement.

What is of specific relevance to publishing *ACC* now is that the 19th-century issues of political organisation have become intertwined with the digital revolution which the CIS program had begun to acknowledge and analyse. As too has the production process of publishing and disseminating. The implications are complex.

I am writing shortly after an impressive electoral victory by a Labour Party which has spent much of the past several years in effect repudiating and discarding the high hopes of what for a short while involved, recruited, excited, and enthused a half million (or so) of mainly young new adherents, supporters, even members of a 'socialist' movement, with the label 'Corbyn'. Much of that phenomenon was directly due to an impassioned articulation of far more than familiar limited 'demands' and indirectly from the impact of the new communications technologies. (Meanwhile, a 'movement' labelled MAGA has successfully accorded presidential or even imperial power to the appalling figure of Trump.)

One can suggest that (differently in each case) the sclerotic but entrenched structure, organisation, and procedures of most contemporary (i.e. 'traditional') political parties, with ingrained mechanisms or ways of operating which grind on, are almost indifferent to the modes of connecting, linking, cooperating, collaborating, organising made available by the transformation in communications but also impervious to the potential for creative ways of accessing or intervening in 'politics' – conveniently abbreviated by the term 'social media'. A different model of political engagement and identity is barely acknowledged by a Parliamentary Labour Party stuck in the procedures of the 1980's if not the 1950's. The thesis ends just at the point at which the future Labour Party came into being.

Allow me a retrospect. In my teens it was possible to watch in live-time television the daily broadcasting of the annual autumn conferences of the main political parties and, most interestingly, the Trades Union Conference. Such full coverage would be almost unthinkable on any UK public channel now, apart perhaps from a dedicated streaming site. But it was possible to watch the always entangled Machiavellian manoeuvrings around motions, speakers, card votes, 'composite motions', committee reports, and the manipulative use of media interviews or the selective coverage of the mainstream *News* bulletins. One learned to follow the cumbersome routes and stratified negotiation procedures through which any attempt at intervening or even contributing to a debate was steered. This was, clearly, how 'politics' was done. The dominant impression was that the main concern of the party leadership was 'managing' the conference.

Which was also the core priority in the procedures of politics more generally.

Government was 'management' and Britain *plc* was a company like any other, offering a portfolio of disparate policies and costed programs. It was not necessary to implement any systemic or more fundamental economic change, still less involve members in deciding what was to be 'managed' outside of the 'insider' world of party headquarters or the corridors and committee rooms of the House of Commons, or Lords, and it was almost impossible to know what was eventually being decided to implement as 'party' policy. There was not much sense of being invited or encouraged to find out, and even less to attempt to change any such policies. Again Lukács's point seemed generally applicable: that 'policy' discussions could apparently accommodate a range of options but it was a handful, or couch-full, of individuals in Number 10 who actually decided. About stabilising rather than transforming 'the economy', as the deciding priority. Inevitably, perhaps? Moreover, given the English election pattern, if a party was 'in opposition' for several years it actually had no 'decision' to implement and therefore could spend even more time and effort on managing the party members.

This feature was reinforced by geography. London was, as in all matters, where 'decisions' and much else 'happened'. Beyond London, everywhere else was provincial and marginal. Some of these motifs were dramatised by a co-author of the *May Day Manifesto*, writing in a different capacity: Raymond Williams's 1966 television play *A Letter from the Country* follows the frustrating processes through which a provincial teacher tries to intervene in a cover-up of a 'leaked' document which involves both an MP and a newspaper correspondent in disinformation and denial in order to safeguard a parliamentary 'career'. It is the obfuscations and blockages which are symptomatic rather than the details of the specific plot.

That title, accurate for its time, bridges us to the present and a modification, or perhaps more, in the issues of party, organisation, management, centralisation, marginality, and so on. Today one can readily "e-mail your M.P." – an action, or click, daily advocated by a dozen emails from a changing medley of online campaigns, pressure groups, single-issue activists, a proliferation of mailing lists clamouring for attention in an updated version of the Mrs. Gaskell syndrome: if you want 'action' send emails through a mailing list so that thousands will send an email… – and perhaps in the process also make a small donation to fund the maintenance of the mailing list. It works, sometimes, as in the case, for example, of Amnesty.

That "your MP" is the target even carries a faint trace of residual geography in a process which can often ignore location – please sign an online petition about a planning dispute in a Welsh village, an eviction in Sunderland, or child poverty in Uganda, and contribute to a fund for tsunami victims in… – or urgently save an elephant sanctuary in Kenya. Or one can, in effect, e-mail – though now it is again a 'post' – to a few hundred, thousands, or more, on X or Y or Z platform. All without ever meeting anyone, even in the pub. But 3000 characters is hardly enough even for a concise demand, or a rhetorical flourish, let alone a serious analysis or debate. Brevity and rapid response encourage CAPITAL LETTER emphasis or simply downright insult and attack. And other familiar forms of click activism. Not forgetting robotic bots. And systematic disinformation. One could add blogs, podcasts, subscription bulletins, insider websites, and a myriad more ways in which an online 'discussion' might perhaps proceed – a spectrum, as Lukács said, of numerous 'minority' opinions and multiple proposed strategies… But how, again, now, is a 'decision' to be made, and by whom, except still in the old ways (with a dash of polling taken into account)?

And decisions about what? One of the problems with the 'totalising' analysis, or map, of the *May Day Manifesto* (now available online) was that it did not, in fact, constitute a 'manifesto', a set of specific, realistic and realisable demands, a program which might act as a shared let alone agreed focus for the many different local and limited 'agencies' or groupuscules which might concur in the overall analysis but would each see their own particular issue as the priority measure to be pursued.

Today, it might just be possible to argue that the overwhelming priority to situate at the core of any totalising analysis and therefore propose to shape a coherent government ranking of urgent and necessary action and decision is that complex intersection of emergencies encapsulated in the hopelessly weak and mealy-mouthed term – barely even a slogan – "climate change". Precisely because any serious and sustained attempt to 'combat' the multiple causes, effects, and special interests entwined in 'climate change' would involve and could transform the 'single issues' and their relation to each other – as the pivotal 'transitional demand' potentially implicating all the others.

Which would nevertheless probably not be recognised, yet, as such by many who regard other concerns as more pressing and immediate. As is currently clear from the dire electoral history of 'Green' parties. The 'cost of living' takes precedence over the cost of survival.

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To conclude, some of today's emails are worth noting:

> Thank you immensely if you signed the [Just Stop Oil] petition . . calling for a public information campaign on the climate crisis. The number of signatures rose from 7,000 to 13,000 in less than a day! Now sitting at 18,500 signatures, the government must respond in writing today. And if this petition reaches 100,000 signatures before March, it will trigger a parliamentary debate.
> Why bother when we're always going on about how petitions don't work? Because, whatever the outcome is will create a story.

And:

> Stop the War's 2024 - 2025 AGM will take place online on Sunday 2 February 2025**.** The AGM is where the policies of the coalition are discussed and decided for the next year. All Stop the War members, along with delegates from local groups and affiliates, are entitled to attend and vote.

Meanwhile, from the USA:

> Both broadcast and cable television allow campaigns to advertise almost exclusively by where voters live or what programs they are watching. But many of the ascendant streaming services and smart TVs allow advertisers to be far more precise — down to picking specific individuals to serve ads to. How the leading Trump Super PAC and his campaign targeted these streamers provided a critical yet unseen edge in Mr. Trump's sweeping victory last month.
>
> Practically every presidential election brings about a technological leap or innovation in how campaigns target key voters. The re-election campaign of George W. Bush pioneered using the partisan tilt of particular cable networks to find Republicans on, for instance, the Golf Channel. The Barack Obama campaigns went further, dividing cable programming into dozens of segments to air cost-effective ads when swing voters were likeliest to watch. The first Trump campaign leveraged Facebook to run tens of thousands of variations to elevate only the most effective ads.
>
> The 2024 presidential race is the first when streaming services with ads were drawing big enough audiences to matter. By October 2024, Nielsen had estimated that streaming made up 40

> percent of TV viewing. And while not every platform allows ads to be matched to individuals . . enough do to have made a meaningful difference, according to Trump campaign and super PAC officials.
>
> The Trump super PAC team drew up a plan to target these so-called 'streaming persuadables' relentlessly. It worked with political modellers to pair the polling data with consumer information and match it to the voter rolls in the seven swing states. The end result was an actual list of 6.3 million individual voters. It amounted to the team's best guess of the universe of undecided voters who would ultimately decide the 2024 election — and now it could target them on streaming television, in their mailboxes, by phone and at their doors

And:

> Fresh off bankrolling Trump's election campaign, Elon Musk is said to be considering donating $100 million to Nigel Farage's Reform Party. There's no beating around the bush here: he's trying to buy UK democracy - and we can't let him. Sign the petition now demanding a cap on political donations from foreign billionaires like Musk.

Farage's Reform UK Party Ltd is technically a limited liability privately owned company which is, of course, free to accept unlimited 'investment', including overseas and anonymous contributions to finance its potentially varied commercial activities.

I am inclined to conclude that I have no useful suggestions or practical solutions for how the organisation of a political party, movement, government, might be reshaped by the potential of digital communications and likely future developments (de-centralised social media, encrypted exchanges, personalised algorithms, block-chain record-keeping, cyber-currency financing, etc.). We have inherited variations on the problems faced by my four autobiographers more than a century ago. There are, of course, more important issues, as Lukács recognised, than how political engagement is organised, but the problem remains pivotal for any social formation we might want to regard as democratic, let alone socialist. And for a human planet we might want to protect and preserve.

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This account of four 19th-century 'working class' autobiographers provides an unusual perspective upon some pivotal events and movements, Peterloo, Chartism, the Anti-Corn Law League, the Fraternal Democrats, early Trade Unions, from the viewpoints of an activist, a journalist, a beggar, and a would-be revolutionary.

Samuel Bamford, Alexander Somerville, James Burn, and Thomas Frost are all lively and engaging in their own written lives while raising questions about political involvement and organisation which remain unresolved today.

The title echoes the classic 1923 work *History & Class Consciousness* by Georg Lukács while exploring aspects of the long making of today's 'working class' in Britain.

Bernard Sharratt's books include *Reading Relations*, *The Literary Labyrinth*, and several NCQ titles including *Drama & Democracy* and *Politics & Letters*. He co-edited *Performance & Politics in Popular Drama* with David Bradby and Louis James) and has written film-texts, plays, and Eliotics.

New Crisis Quarterly **is an imaginary periodical which sometimes publishes books which readers are invited to re-write or re-imagine themselves. This, however, is a 'proper' book.**